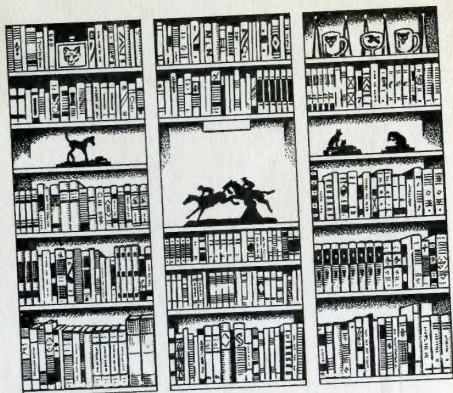
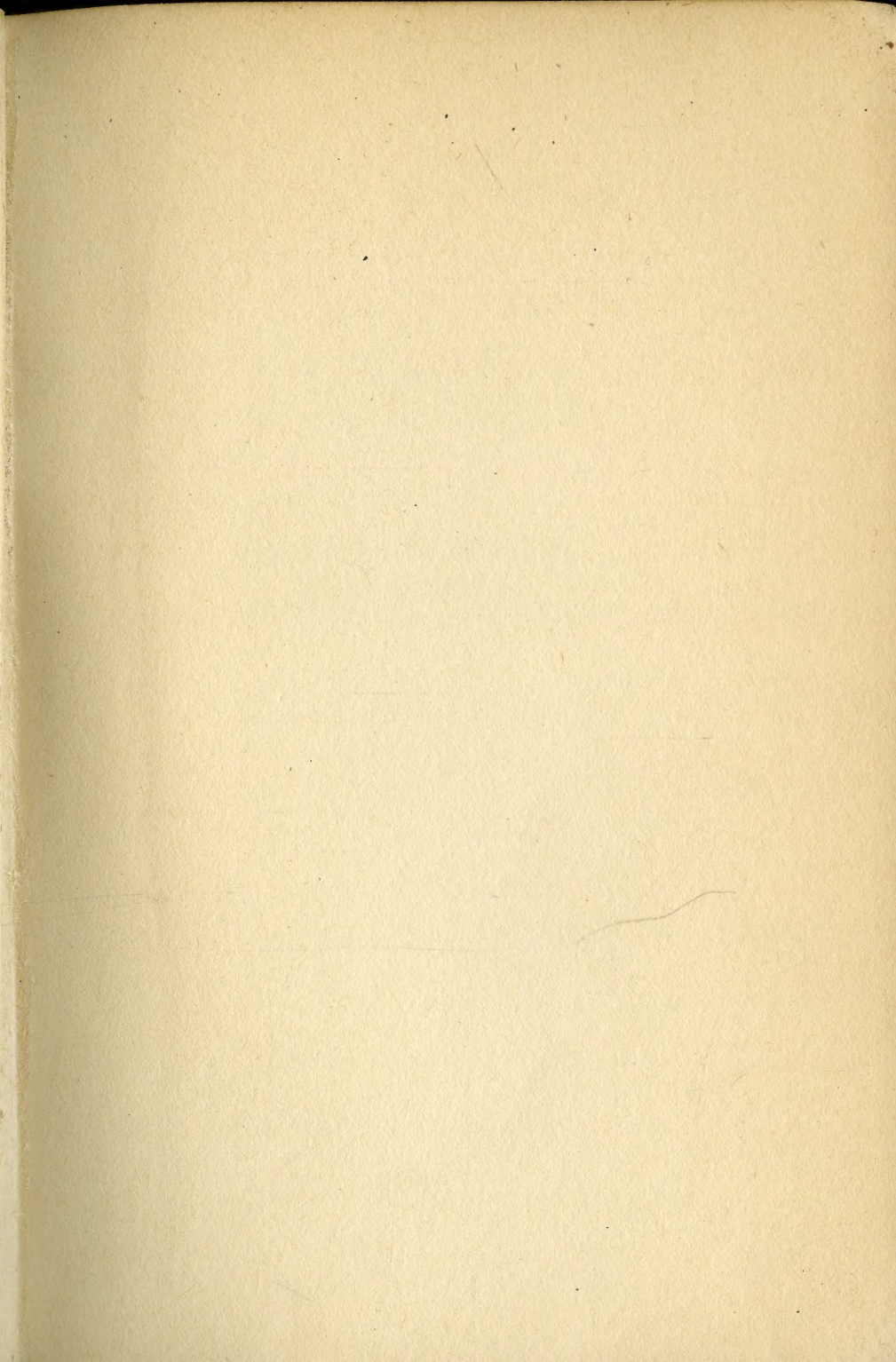


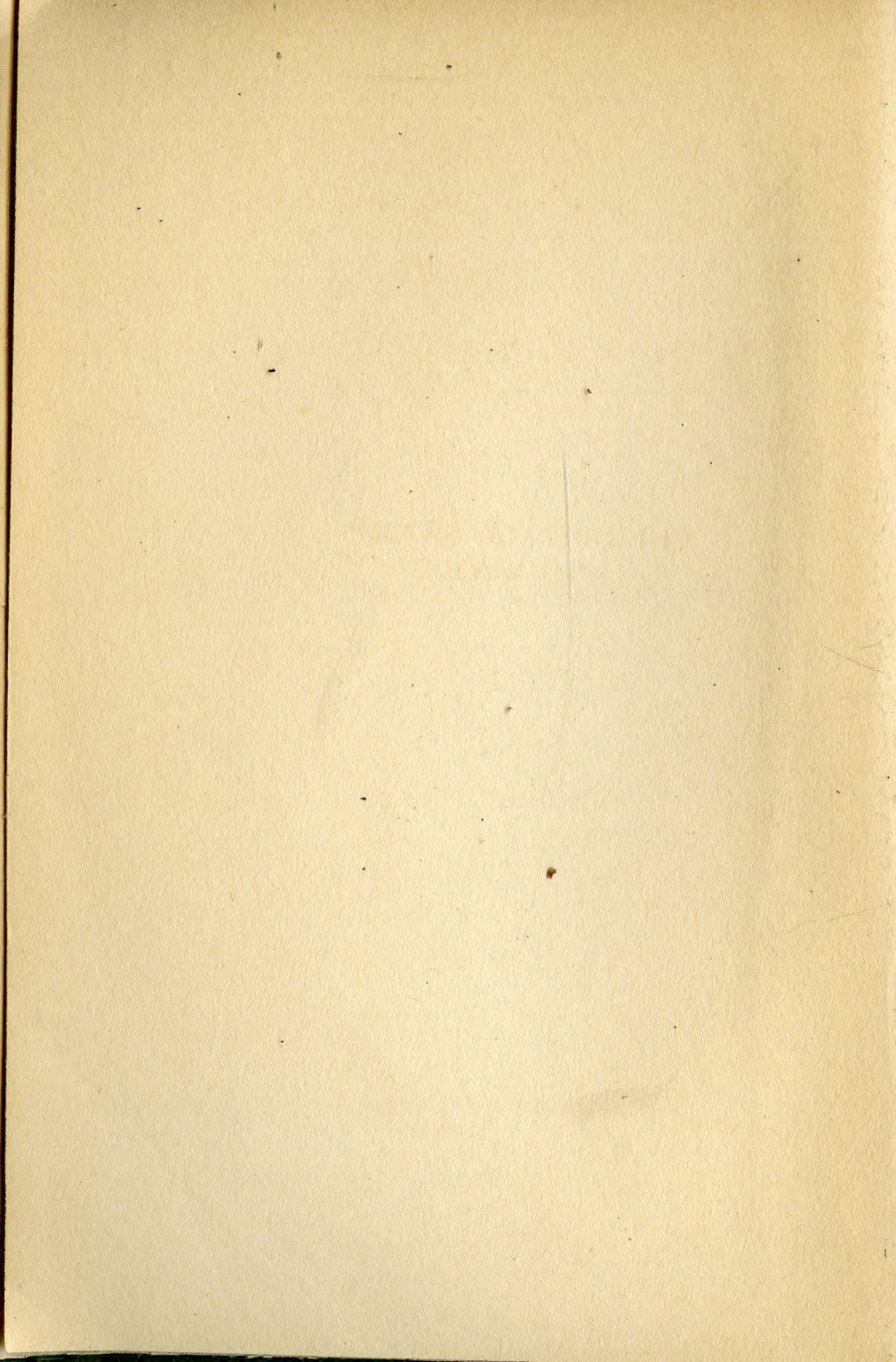
*Children
of
Swamp and Wood*

ARCHIBALD RUTLEDGE



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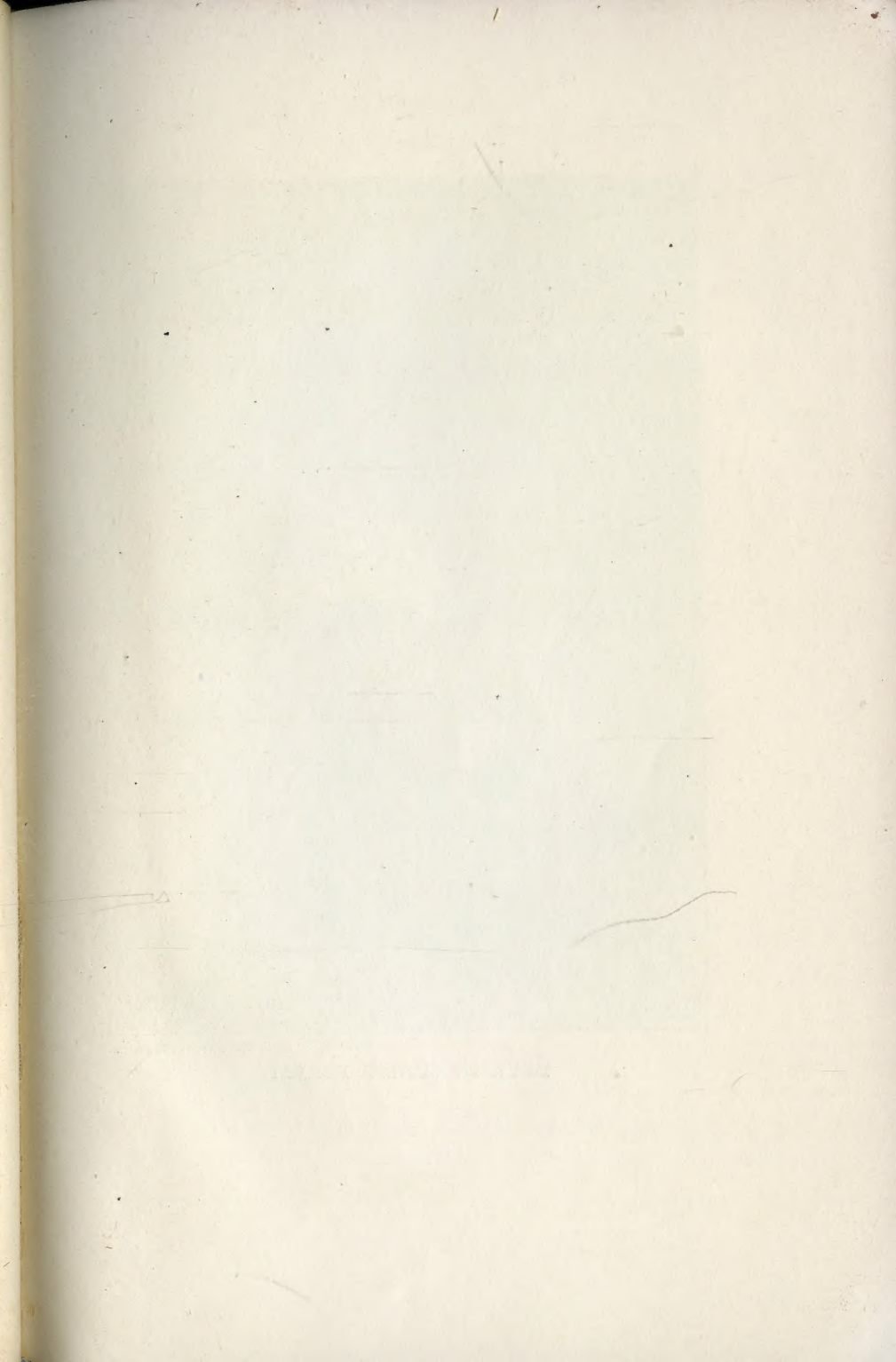


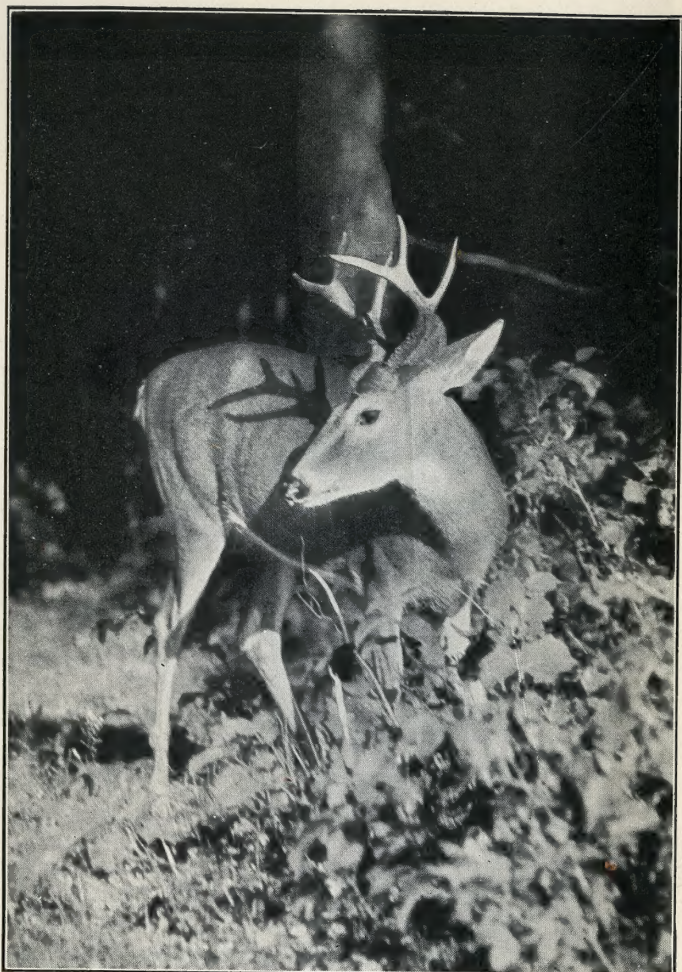
CHILDREN OF SWAMP
AND WOOD

Books by Archibald Rutledge



CHILDREN OF SWAMP AND WOOD
DAYS OFF IN DIXIE
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OLD PLANTATION DAYS
PLANTATION GAME TRAILS
SONGS FROM A VALLEY
SOUTH OF RICHMOND
THE BANNERS OF THE COAST
UNDER THE PINES



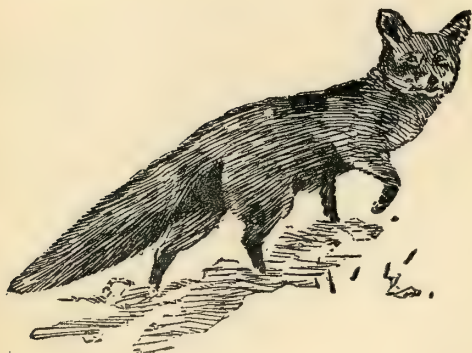


Courtesy of Field and Stream Magazine

DEER IN SUNLIT FOREST

CHILDREN OF SWAMP AND WOOD

BY
ARCHIBALD RUTLEDGE



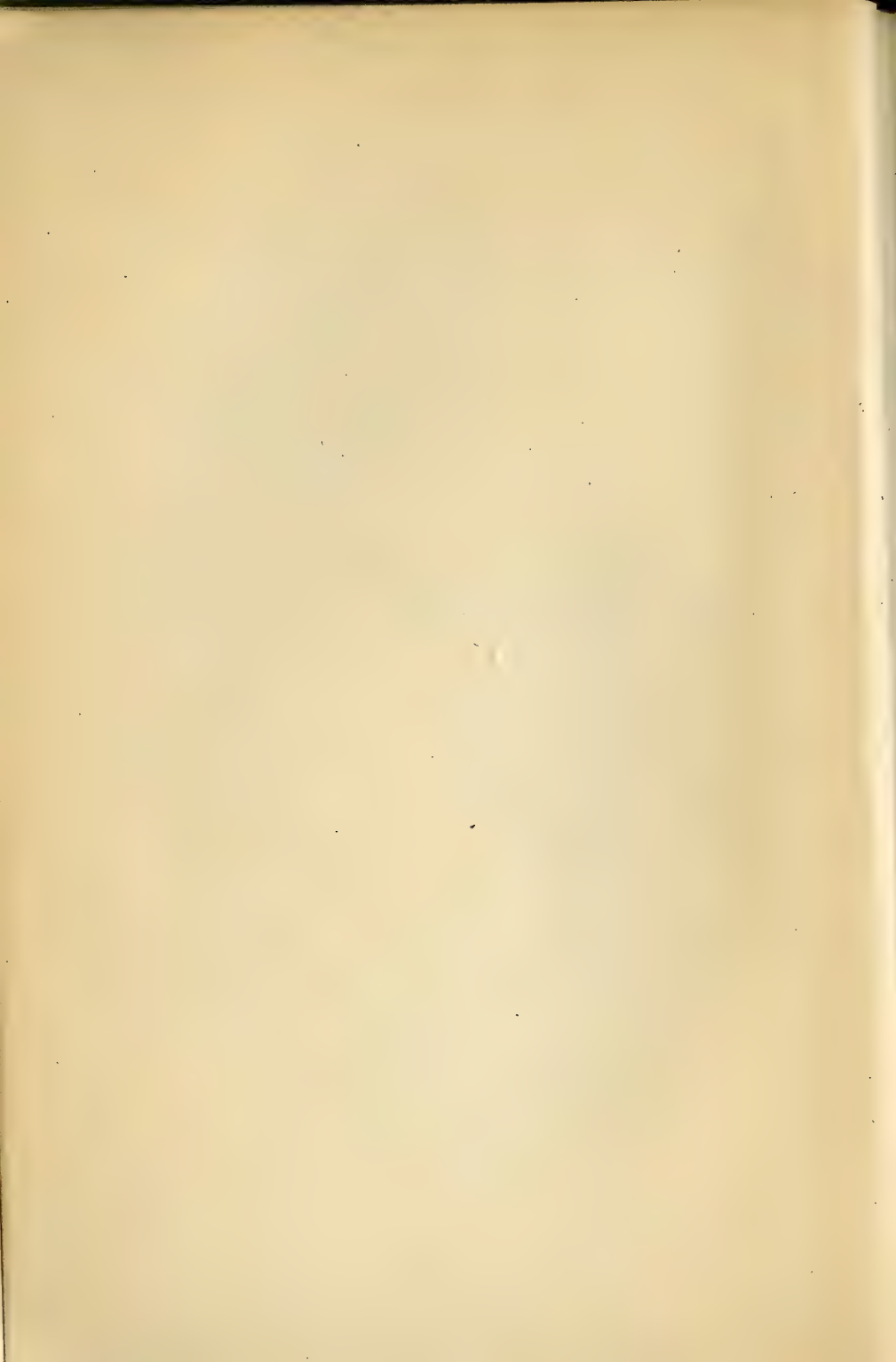
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FIRST EDITION

TO
CAMILLA SCOTT PINCKNEY
TO WHOM I OWE MORE THAN
EVEN LOVE CAN REPAY



No More Waste Land

Every wild wing of the harried, the hunted,
Every fleet foot of the stalked, the pursued,
Every bright eye of the fearful, the followed,
Solace may find in this blithe solitude.
Here the wing folds by the peace of the water,
Here the feet pause in the woodland's bright calm;
Here the eye rests, for the woods and the waters,
Friendly and welcoming, offer their balm.

Beautiful wings of the air and the river,
Wonderful eyes of the forest and glade,
Marvellous voices atune with the dawn-wind,
Welcome, ah, welcome to sun and to shade!
Here you may have the desired, the cherished—
Only the warrant in freedom to live;
Here in this happy place stayed is the hand of man,
Opened the heart of man—refuge to give.

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CHILDREN OF SWAMP AND WOOD

I

FAMILIAR PLACES

FROM the first day of September until the fifteenth day of the following January—for more than a third of a year—day in and day out, earnest men had had tireless designs upon his life. They were head hunters; and his was the coveted head.

The fastest and most sure-footed horses, the most patient and sagacious hounds, the craftiest hunters armed with shotguns and with rifles of almost incredible range, all these had been employed in the stern business of trying to cut short the romantic career of an old friend of mine.

A thousand perils he weathered. A thousand wild races, deft dodges, sly elusions, dim lurkings, silent crouchings; all these he executed with the finesse that only a wary wild creature can employ. And when the season closed, that long and perilous season, the antlers of the great buck were not drying out drearily

at a taxidermist's; they were still wet by the fragrant dews of the pineland morning, and from them the early starshine of the lonely swamp shed little silver sparkles.

While he was being hunted, this buck had fled from home; but a day or so after the season closed, back he came; back to where his mother, long before, had first bleated tenderly to him, and taught him his first trembling steps; back to those very places whence he had been hounded and shot at; back to the wild places he knew and loved best.

He had quit the country for a while; but off in the hinterlands he had nearly perished of homesickness. He simply had to get back. He just had to see the old home again—even as you and I!

This particular stag I had known for many years; and I was made aware of his return home almost as soon as he came, for his track was unlike that of any of the other deer on our plantation. The hoof of the right foreleg was twisted, so that his track was readily identified. All the hunters in that part of the country knew it well; but they did not seem to be able to improve their acquaintance with him in the manner they wished. I was a little better acquainted with him, I think. At least, I appreciated his high intelligence and his love of home.

Since fawnhood he had been one of my friends. I knew just what walks he took at night, in those dim and dewy hours when he loved to roam the glimmering country of the darkness. It made me glad to see his tracks reappear along their ancient wildwood routes.

It did my heart good to see that his own wild, sensitive heart was enjoying once more that keen delight that only a return to the old home can give.

A boy may be born in Sandy Corners; he may go far away to college; he may rise to fortune and fame in some metropolis; but, depend upon it, one of his most secret and ardent ambitions is to return some day to his native heath. There are few stronger holds upon people than geographical ones. The human spirit pines for home; and since wild creatures are remarkably, sometimes absurdly, like us, they have many of our own inspirations and longings.

That old stump-toed stag lived in what I called my place, near the Santee River, in South Carolina; but in a certain very real sense he was the genuine owner of the property. A boy once asked his father who owned the mountains, and the father said that he who loved them owned them. This splendid buck loved my woods even better than I did; for I might as well confess that if someone had hounded me and shot at me and raced me off my own domain, I might hesitate long ere returning to the hearthstone.

But with a wild creature this pull of home is irresistible; and to me, the recognition of it is pathetic, appealing. To understand it is to be opening one more of those magic, mysterious doors in the great House of Life. Wandering in that spacious dwelling, getting fleeting glimpses of how our comrades live, of their cares and hopes and loves, we come at least dimly to understand somewhat better the meaning of our

existence. We call ourselves the children of God; but perhaps all are His children. In the tremendous fact of possessing the gift of life itself, all of us are the same. And we are the same, too, in this matter of loving home.

Within sight, indeed within call, of my house, wild turkeys nest every year. During more than one season I have watched a brooding hen turkey come from her nest into the bowed and brown cottonfield for her noontide meagre foraging. I have found nests close to the rail fences that border the home fields. Anyone who has watched a tame turkey's craft in nesting time—her patient, tedious secretiveness, her gentle self-effacement—can have a very correct idea of the behaviour of the wild turkey at such a season.

But, touching and strange to relate, this most wild and astute bird, once on her nest, can be readily approached. For a man to catch a wild turkey on her nest is no difficult task. "Perfect love casteth out fear." Even so. I have seen it with my own eyes.

In due time her brood comes forth, and she knows the mystic and infinite pride of motherhood. She watches with delight the behaviour of every one of her little helpless children. She loves them. She mothers them. She radiates maternal affection and that watchful and constant sacrifice that is the chief charm of deep devotion.

I remember watching one day in late spring such a brood in a wild tangle of greenery just beyond a field of young corn. The turkeys had been hatched in an

adjacent thicket, a dim, sweet place, where jasmines tossed their showers like golden fountains playing, where smilax rioted over hollies, scrub oaks, and myrtles, with here and there a patriarch oak keeping the copse away from the generous area that he sheltered. Shimmering little sunny glades beneath huge pines were here, lonely fair paths beside which the tall wood violets grew; aisles carpeted with brown pine straw, offering always a spicy odour in which the scents of dew, jasmine blossoms, myrtle leaves, and pine seemed commingled. To those who are aware of attar of roses, I can recommend that hale fragrance.

I was sitting on a stump in a small clump of myrtles when the turkeys were heard approaching. But for the noise they make walking through the leaves and brush, a flock of grown wild turkeys can be singularly silent. But it was not so with these children. I heard a faint elfin piping—flute notes of a quality most delicate, yet almost piercing in their soft sweetness.

And for every plaintive or excited call that the little ones gave, the old mother had an instant reassuring answer. I am not sure what language she was using, but what she assuredly said was, "Never mind; that's all right." The infants seemed to stray a good deal, running into blind alleys among the deep greenery, getting into dense heaps of leaves, and not being able to extricate themselves just handily, lagging behind the flock to gaze about at the great new world into which they had come. They were real babes in the woods, full of innocence and of wonder.

Whenever he was in doubt, one of the little fairy wanderers would pause, looking to be, though not actually, on tiptoe, would gaze about for a moment with glistening eyes, and then would complain of his plight in a dulcet treble. The old mother never failed to supply an answering note of comfort. For his dismay, even though childish and imaginary, she was always the solace. She understood; she sympathized.

I watched her leading her brood into a dim pathway shadowed by trailing vines. Ever on the alert was she—wise, patient, cautious. One tiny turkey got his foot caught between a jagged strip of bark and the fallen limb to which it clung. He tugged manfully, his gleaming feathers fluffily dishevelled, but the grip hurt his ankle. He complained. Instantly the old mother went to him, looked carefully at the situation, made sure of the trouble, drove her black beak at the offending bark, and so freed the tiny captive.

I shall never forget with what delicate abandon and grace that little wild thing, liberated from what might have proved a dangerous trap, fled joyously down the sun-flecked pathway toward its companions, its tiny wings held up, its feet twinkling, its faint pipings sounding on the still forest air with pathetic, winsome charm—as if a child of Titania herself were taking music lessons on a fairy flute.

I have said a good deal about these turkeys; so much, in fact, that you have a right to ask if I wander as much as they do. But my purpose all along is to

show how they love their home woods. These wild birds, the noblest, I think, in all the world, and certainly the most splendid in our own country, follow a certain routine every year that, when understood, proves their attachment for the place where they are born.

Near the old hearthstone they live until the first gun of the hunting season is fired. Then, with admirable sagacity, they betake themselves across the river into the mysterious fastness of a mouldering swamp. There they stay as long as the sportsman is abroad in the land.

But during all those months they do not forget home. When the first bull alligator begins to moan his profound and ludicrous love lyric; when the first yellow jasmine begins to hang out its golden bells, when the first warm, cloudy weather sets the frog chorals going, then the turkeys will come back, their ranks thinned, perhaps—and all of them wiser and warier birds. But no fear will ever keep them from the old home woods. The flock will break up. Mating will begin. And the great cycle of life will once more be commenced.

And now imagine waters so dark and still that out of them might issue the voice of the Delphic Oracle. This dim lake lies in a wood so deep, so cloistered, that even a black tempest, ramping through the pine-land country, will hardly dimple the serenity of its beauty. It has the stillness of felicity. Its silent loveliness reminds me that merely to be is perhaps a greater

thing than to achieve; to radiate peace and quiet joy is better than to whirl along with the hoof-hearted hurry of Progress.

I love to sit on a yellow pine stump on a sunny edge overlooking this lost lagoon near my old home; for not only is eternal beauty here but an old friend of mine as well—a shy, elusive, intelligent creature. This has been his home as long as I can remember. My acquaintance is an otter, a regal black old male that has apparently become solitary.

From this shimmering pond to the Santee River the distance is half a mile; and the two are connected by a dim watercourse, choked by alders, wild blackberries, and masses of tangled muscadine vines. Occasionally the otter travels down this outlet, disappears himself for a while in the river, and in the old fresh-water canals on the island beyond it; but this lake he calls home.

I remember that one winter, for about six months, a negro woodsman tried to trap him right in the superb swimmer's own house, here in the still-hearted lagoon. But the otter, sensing trouble, vacated the premises for a month or two. When the season for traps was passed he returned, to glide like a miniature submarine in and out among the strange cypress knees; to dive glossily, with glimmering swiftiness, after the lazy green-sided bass of the black waters; to lie out on his favourite log, preening his exquisite fur.

From my throne on the old stump I have watched him on his throne, an old cypress log. I have observed

him, in moments of joyous relaxation, enjoying the beauty about him; watching with soft-gleaming eyes the green pennons of reeds drooping on the margins of the pond; the bloom of wonder on the mysterious vistas between the lonely trees; the far blaze of sunset through the dark-tressed pine; the infinite wan gulfs of evening.

Under the roots of an immense cypress, centuries old, roots that spread away from the shaft of the tree, the otter has a den. From his basking-log to the entrance of his abode the distance is about ten feet; and I should say that the very swiftest and deftest thing I ever saw a wild animal do is the manner in which this graceful otter leaves his log and dives home. I get a shimmer of glistening fur, of a darting black form, incredibly lithe, a soft, foamy plunge—and it's over.

We hear a great deal about the intelligence of wild creatures; but it appears to me that rather too much emphasis has been laid on their mere cunning and craftiness. For my part, watching them as I have always loved to, in their own wild homes, I have seemed to discover in them a decided capacity for enjoying the beauties amid which they live. Have we not entirely neglected to consider their sense of appreciation, their love of lovely things? I know that here perhaps we are on the borderland of the imagination; yet since God assuredly created beauty for the pleasure of his children, for the healing of their hearts, we have no right to presume that we are the only members

of His great family who have the sense of the artistic, the recognition and the love of the beautiful. If a soul wakens in Man, at least it stirs in the Brute.

For more than an hour I have watched a group of deer standing on high sand dunes of a lonely sea beach, motionless, statuesque, gazing out over the rolling surf. To think that they were not actually enjoying the ever-fascinating spectacle of the ocean is asking too much of simple reason.

I have watched tiny wrens and gorgeous cardinals sing with the most abandoned ecstasy just in the dewiest hour of dawn; and I have seen and heard the male mockingbird sing in the air, by moonlight, melodies of pure delight. Who ever saw a wild thing look squalid or live in a squalid home? Even the dimmest den of the harried fur-bearer is less in need of a spring cleaning than is many a human dwelling.

All wild things seem to me high-born. They have a certain elegance. Of my wild acquaintances, the most apparently grotesque is the bull alligator; yet in his element he can swim gracefully, and he can execute certain fancy dives that no man can equal.

Even this grim saurian loves home. You might think him the most cold-blooded and phlegmatic of creatures; but somewhere in that strange heart lurks the infinite yearning for home. For example, there was one of heroic size that lived in a lagoon known as Jones's Pond, near my South Carolina home. This alligator I knew well, because of his size, because of the loss of a certain section of his tail, and because of his unusual colouring. The river alligators take on

the reddish tinge that impregnates the water; those that live in the lagoons are much darker.

One summer, Jones's Pond went nearly dry. I came one day on the track of the big bull; he was heading for the river. I followed the trail, but he had reached the Santee before I did. That was early in August. I knew that, once in the river, he would be in a place alive with others of his kind, and would find accessible thousands of congenial reed-hung creeks, marshy banks on which to bask, dim haunts beneath bluffs. I thought he would never return. But I had not realized what home must have meant to him.

One morning in late September I was riding out through the woods looking for some strayed stock. I could hear the old pines dimly playing music that might have come from dulcimers. The fitful sea wind touched a fragrant copse of young hickories, making them murmur and wave and shed the dew; and it seemed to me that the wind was a mystic wand, touching the trees until they began softly to sing.

Within a few hundred yards of Jones's Pond my horse (I was in a reverie) suddenly stopped. I felt him tremble under me, and he suspired a stormy snort of indignant amazement and apprehension. It was no wonder.

Prone in our path was a huge dragon—a grotesque, primeval creature—an incredible survivor from the Age of Monsters. It was my bull alligator crawling back home! He had spent six weeks in the river wilds; but he had evidently been homesick. It is all right to visit one's distant relatives; but, after all,

home is home. Here he was, almost at the end of a long and perilous crawl, not quite within sight but certainly within smell of the waters he loved best. The lagoon exhales a damp perfume. I had always enjoyed it; but here was another creature who must have enjoyed it more.

It bores an alligator to travel overland. He is at a tremendous disadvantage. His progress is tedious; his pathway may be rough; certainly it is beset with dangers. But we know of what small deterring power all the objections in the world are when we want to get back home. Nor was my dragon's return untimely; for we had had abundant rains to refill the lagoon. Of course he knew about those rains as well as I.

Much to the distaste of my horse, we followed the old monster down to the edges of the pond. I shall never forget with what evident boyish delight he took a little waddling run down the last mossy slope of the bank and slithered into the black water.

In the forest not far from this lagoon I know a big bay tree that is the summer residence of two black pileated woodpeckers—handsome birds, almost as large as the ruffed grouse, black-coated fellows, with scarlet crests and a touch of white in their wings. The tree is of a singularly romantic sort. It stands with its feet planted in the amber waters of a woods stream. The bay tree is an evergreen, of course, and its foliage is fragrant. Indeed, the whole tree smells sweet—leaves, bark, wood. It is the kind of tree against which a buck loves to rub the velvet from his horns.

About twelve feet up, just above the first limb, and directly over it, there is a clean hole of perfect symmetry, drilled into the green wood by these two birds, these master cabinetmakers. For many years it has been the nesting place of this same pair of woodpeckers. Throughout the late summer, the autumn, and the winter they may roam far; but when mating time returns, they come back to the old home. Indeed, their arrival at their summer place is remarkably punctual. They come a good while before the actual mating season—just to look things over, to get the house in order, to enjoy this perennial site of their wooing, mating, rearing of young.

I used to watch these birds from a small sandy hillock, grown to scrub oaks. Let us say that it is sunrise on a morning in early April. The dawn comes up, not "like thunder," as Kipling's *Mandalay* morning came, but like a maned seabreaker, fringed with soft fire. The woods are still. Winy colours flush the wet thickets—amber, amethyst, gold. A silver mist trembles around the pine copses. A miracle is being performed, the ancient, unelaborate miracle of Dawn.

As I look off through the woods, two lordly black birds, with brilliant crests come winging their flight toward the tall bay tree. On they come, assured, glad, calling joyously, already one in that communion that we call mating. They both alight on the green limb that juts out below the hollow, a limb worn rather smooth by their use of it in other years.

The male, his glossy plumage glinting, remains

perched on the limb while the female enters the hollow. For a moment she vanishes. Then she reappears at the aperture, only her head showing. Presently her head disappears; then it comes into view once more, her bill packed with certain dry sticks. They are perfectly good materials from last year's nest. But this is springtime. A woman has to clean house, you know. Out of the hollow tumble the sticks.

The male, meanwhile, acts in a manner rather typical of his sex's behaviour at such a time; he keeps his distance and his silence, he appears to admire the scenery of the surrounding woods. But in reality he gazes with an astonished eye at his mate's assiduity, marvelling that she finds so much to fling out of the house, having vague misgivings as to certain treasures of his that might vanish in the general avalanche!

I love to watch this pair of birds go back to house-keeping in the same apartment, in the deep green metropolis of the wildwoods, wrapped new in the sweet, virtuous passion of the virgin spring. It is the season of the renewal of life and of hope. There is abroad the perfume of poetry and romance. It is one of the best times for the human heart to steal away to God—to leave life's highroad for a while; to relax and renew the soul; and to read the ancient, simple stories told in nature's green, gigantic book. In those stories lies the balm for many a heartache. The quiet hand of the forest can still the sad pulse's leap; the wood has a gentle voice of the same wave length as the heart.

A poet, I am told, once wrote a song to his ladylove

with the refrain, "You are home to me." Whether or not he realized it, there could be no deeper praise; for home is where the heart can rest, where joy stills the quiet. And these wild things of the air and the woods and fields, they love home; and their homes are usually very beautiful. Keen and unspoiled as their senses are, I know they must love the aromatic airs of the pinelands, the lush burgeonings of swamp and bay branch and savanna; the pathetic beauty of the wild flower's little brimming eye; the peace upon the waters of the mystic, still lagoon, at day-break awakening in azure from its ebon sleep; the fairy forests of grass and fern; the tall white lily-stars; the mystery yielded by the deep of night; the splendour of the wide-winged sunset. They have felt, as we have, the appeal of the wild, forsaken beauty of the moorland and the sedge field; of great pines, tressed with light, standing against a wild-rose west; the tremulous green mists of the springtime; the regal bronzing of the autumn woods.

II

A WOODLAND COURTSHIP

ONE October day I was walking along the dewy sweet border of a deep bay thicket in the wasteland of the great Carolina coastal country. The sun was not yet up. Hale airs made the great pines murmur and wave, shedding with their melodious music aromatic odours—primeval forests fragrances that the heart is fain to dream may be the very breath of life, of death, or of love. Those three are, after all, the great trinity.

Down a dim forest pathway, overhung with misty grass tops, I saw a doe coming. She had not seen me. Indeed, she was in full flight; and naturally she was chiefly concerned with what was behind her rather than with what was before her. Lithe, exquisite, a veritable palpitation out of the great forest's heart, feminine in that mysterious sex's indefinable delicacy, on she came. She did not run as a deer runs from dogs or men—in mad, incontinent flight, with tail high and nervously jerked from side to side with the rocking of the haunches. The flight of this doe, beautiful to behold, was merely a part of the ancient hide-and-seek game of the female and the male. Having in it no fear,

it yet possessed an alluring imitation of timidity—purposeful in its shyness, fatal in its modesty. Here was suddenly divulged the passionate, exquisite, infallible lure of Beauty's shadowy feigned avoidance.

Love's fugitive passed me; rocked lithely through a golden breast-high sedgefield; trotted through a red copse of huckleberry; paused; dodged through a small myrtle-bordered pond; passed up an old lumber road; paused once more to look back. Was this a flight? It was full of sweet delays of feigned escape. Hers was that flight which yearns for pursuit. She wanted to be followed, perhaps followed fast; but she didn't want to be overtaken—not yet. While unqualified to venture an opinion on so wide a subject, I believe it universally true of the feminine that capture is sweeter after long, arduous, dangerous, oft-frustrated pursuit. The game, at any rate, is one of stunning contradictions; and perhaps is not yet fully mastered by far wiser than I. It has to do with frantic, wild denials, with impetuous, intimate surrender. It has to do with much that is mystic. Some things are not meant to be explained.

The doe that I had been watching faded into the distant forest—vanishing in that silent and eerie fashion which is characteristic of deer. Of the tremulous spirit of the virgin wilderness are they; and I never see one without feeling that the ancient inscrutable forest has for a moment uttered a beautiful secret—a secret usually held inviolately within the deep wood's wise mothering heart. And now a second

secret that heart was to tell; fast on the track of the doe came the stag.

In this rapturous season of love and of mating, the presence of a doe renders inevitable the presence of a buck. He may be miles behind, but he will follow. Sometimes, several does will herd, possibly feeling a sense of security in so doing. And for days and nights, for weeks—indeed, in some cases, for months—the long pursuit will continue. The virgin does hold out longest.

The buck that was following my doe was a handsome fellow, sheeny in his fresh dun coat, regal in his tall antlers. He was swiftly and shrewdly drinking up the alluring scent that lingered on the trail—"fair, speechless messages," relayed by the dew-hung bushes. It was odd to see him running with his head low, and with an intentness of purpose almost human. He came very close to me. He saw me. Of all living things, I was his fellest and most ancient enemy. Did he swerve from his direction? Did he quit the game? One of the Elizabethan dramatists, I believe, poignantly describes death as the mere giving over of a game that must be lost. But love is a game that must be won; it is not in the heart to give it over. Only a glance of haughty indifference the pursuing stag gave me—such a look as he might have employed to pierce a rival. His broad black nose, with red nostril-pits wide, never left the trail. He recognized me as something living which did not represent the goal of his passionate search. Less than nothing was I in his proud consideration.

With reason it might be supposed that one feature of this forest bridal, this woodland romance, that would lend a peculiarly alluring charm to it would be the fact that the courtship takes place in those dim hours of twilight and of dawn, and in the silver hours of moonlight and of starlight. True, the deer is of the night; and during the gaudy hours of day is usually serenely couched in some lonely thicket. Much mating is done during that time of the day and night when the deer are usually feeding and moving. But so urgent is the impulse of the mating season that the bucks pursue the does throughout the day. I have, in mid-October, in the very heyday of the deer's courtship, observed a twelve-point stag, in all the bald literalness of bright sunshine, in all the utterly trite obviousness of high noon, pursuing in stern passion an elusive acquaintance. The doe I did not see; but she had not been gone long. He would overtake her; perhaps for a week he might follow. But in this kind of game, Nature dooms one to lose. Or do both win? Or does the fugitive win? The course of the male is cave-mannish, obvious, gauche, over-weening; that of the female is subtle, smacking of sorcery, witching in perverseness. I think she wins.

And now the scene changes, and we are among the wild Tuscarora hills of southern Pennsylvania. This is a strange region—close to the hoof-hearted hurry of civilization, yet intimately retired mistily among old mountains haunted by silence and by peace. Across one line of hills can be heard the roar of a

Pennsylvania creeper; across another a fellow freight train on the B. & O. shrieks for a crossing. The air tingles with these blatant voices of Progress. Yet the same air, here in this fastness, is aromatic with the dusky fragrance of dewy hemlocks, with the odour of ripened wild grapes, with those vague but penetrant woodland spiceries of which, assuredly, nectar must be made. The tattered gold of yet unfallen leaves forms fragmentary arras marginal to mystery. Though an amethyst light is fast suffusing the lonely forest, heralding dawn, one great white star trembles like a gleaming jewel in the dark crown of foliage worn by a mountain pine. Still is the forest with primeval stillness; there is no wind, but the woodsy fragrances themselves seem to be breathing, uttering the poignant aromas of the fulfilment of nameless longings. Definitely, I smell shellbarks, damp pine-needles, wet mosses beside a tiny rill, and a profusion of odours sweet as that of an "indolent misty peach," heavy with summer's sweetness stored.

But it is of the love-story of the wild deer that I am wishing to tell; and on this quiet wooded hillside, here is the tale written indelibly. No man who runs can read it; but one who walks slowly, and who pauses long to observe, will translate somewhat as follows the silent but eloquent language of tracks.

Down the side of this shadowy glen, probably late yesterday afternoon, there came a stag. He must have been a sprightly fellow. His stepping was all on edge. His hoofprints, see, are shallow, and they are inclined to tip forward. An old buck is more likely to

walk flat-footed. This cavalier is, in effect, walking on his toes, adopting an anciently approved approach to the lady of his adoration. Here, either something startled him or else the urge of the mystic season impelled him; for, look, he has taken a vibrant leap—eighteen feet by measurement. “How far can a deer jump?” I once inquired of a grizzled swamp-hunter. “As far as he needs to,” came the comprehensive reply. A horse in an English steeplechase has cleared 36 feet; a man has jumped more than 25; a deer has been known, rather unconcernedly, and over no obstacle, to leap 32. A jump of 18 is therefore merely a little frisk. I have measured the casual jump of a doe from her bed; airily she sailed 16 feet. Think of that, from a lying-down position—and without the training of daily-dozen exercise!

Here our buck, reaching the open flat area of an old charcoal hearth, has stood for some time. A stag loves an open place in the woods. I have known deer to stand for hours on sand dunes, gazing at the sea. They like clearings, especially at night—and old roads, and pathways that offer clearance for horns. On the north end of this ancient woodland hearth, telling of a departed race of mountaineers, a wild grape had let down a tapestry of vines, loaded now with frosted purple clusters, deep in bloom. Lusciously they drooped—an affluent offering by the primitive mother. On some of these bunches the stag had champed negligently. But he was not interested in eating. He was not hunting grapes.

Leaving the hearth, he has followed the fragrant

glenside to the lowest bench of the mountain. Here are secret thickets, the mournful beauty of an old clearing, now fast being reclaimed "by the forest"; here, under the girlish grace of silver birches, shimmering in the dusk, under the stubborn hardihood of many a mountain ash and towering poplar, there is a delicious glade. It is a deer rendezvous. I think it beyond dispute possible for creatures of the high intelligence of the deer to prearrange meetings. For example, I once had two stags come straight for me as I stood on a road. They saw me and checked up to reconnoitre. Separating, they passed me like lightning, one running on my right and the other a hundred yards away on my left. A half mile beyond the road they swung together again. And this happened where there was no regular deer run. Of the comings together in the mating season, perhaps the custom of being together in a certain place at a certain time of day has its determining power. But these secret children of the forest have resources of which we do not dream. A deer's sense of locality and of direction is perfect. He is not at all likely to have a wide range. A deer undisturbed, with a sufficient food-supply offered on his range, will likely live and die near where he was born. In home woods, a deer knows every tree and every thicket, every bypath and every road. A doe, secreting her fawn, may go miles away to feed, may return by another route. But her reap-proach to her little one is as infallibly accurate as the flight of a bird to its nest, as the turning of the mother toward her child.

In our mountain glade our sprightly stag had expected a doe. Here, you see, on the glimmering edges of it, he has paused, listening, looking, scenting the hale sweetness of the air.

Circling the glade, let us discover the doe track. Yes, here it is. After a long and palpitating pause, she minced timidly out of the bosky thicket. This buck had pursued her long and arduously, and she had ever eluded him. But such play comes to an end. She has at last relented; perhaps she cannot help herself. Here she has been nervously stamping her dainty feet. Why did not her lover come straight across to her? See, in her restless hope-and-fear mood, she has reached up and caught and broken that hickory twig that you see dangling about five feet above the ground. Many a time have I found such telltale evidence of a doe's tremulous sweet suspense, full of anxiety and of the delight of delay. Let us step into the arena of the glade. Now you see what has happened. This has been indeed an arena.

For a space of twenty yards the ground is torn up by vicious tramlings. The piles of gaudy leaves have been tossed about. Young shoots of maple and of hackberry have been crushed down. Deep into the black sandy loam of the glade there are the savage scars of deeply driven hoofs. As Elaine read the shield of Launcelot, visioning his battles, so you may here read this record of a wild and lonely strife between two furious bucks. They have fought for more than life; they have contested for love. With wide horns clashing, with burly necks lowered, with legs spread

and braced, here they have fought the business out. Look here on this young poplar. Its gray side is smudged with red; and here cling little tufts of white and dun hair. One of the rivals ran the other against this tree. Here, too, is a heavy splotch of blood on this old log. That probably means a rip in the side or in the neck from a sharp horn. For a long time they fought—perhaps for an hour. Then one yielded. Which one was it? Let us see which buck led the doe away. It is not hard to discover; for the bucks have very different tracks. Oh, see! Our friend of the sprightly step has won. He must have been too active for the old stag. The lord and master of the mountain is being replaced. The younger buck fought as lovers fight who are young. And now, into the silent shadows these forest lovers have wandered away. After long waiting, and following, after battle, after victory, love waits. Love is a long inheritance; and from its mystic joys the children of the wild are not excluded.

I described going into the mountain early in the morning and making the observation in question—eavesdropping, as it were. It is after twilight when I come out.

Over the mountain is shed the serene wild glory of the light of an autumn full moon. Its beauty hymns lyrically to the primitive in man. I am out on the lonely road now, a road leading back to the valley and to civilization. But though my face is turned homeward, with a primeval yearning my heart turns

backward—there toward the peace of the silent hills
—the glamour of the moonlit forest—back toward
that beauteous bridal of the forest wilds, deep-veiled
upon the hushed and fragrant bosom of the huge
sequestered night.

III

WASTE LAND

A SIGN of that nature I had never seen before, and there was something so whimsical about it that it seemed the work of a humorist instead of the sage plea of a state game commission. Paraphrased roughly, it read something like this:

"Mr. Farmer, don't keep your place too clean. Leave that forlorn patch of scrub growing over yonder by the creek; leave that briered fence row; leave that bushy ditch bank just as it is. Your best friend of the great bird kingdom, bobwhite, can't live with you if you take away all his cover. Keep most fields clean, if you like, but leave some places deliberately dishevelled for the sake of those who will leave you if you clean away their shelters."

This was a pertinent and a sensible request, put in a far more persuasive way than a cold announcement could have been put. And it serves to introduce a much wider subject and one full of fascination for lovers of the outdoors and the creatures that, for all our proud so-called advancing civilization, remain distinctly Nature's children. Moreover, because of that very advance in man's civilization, the question is a vital one. It is this: What is the relation between

our conquest of the earth and the fate to which that conquest may subject the creatures of the wild? Does the civilization of man mean the extinction of the beast? Well, it easily might.

But there are two great saving elements in this difficult and dangerous situation. The first is that man stays his hand and opens his heart. He protects; he provides sanctuaries. Recognizing the beauty, the companionship, the economic value of wild life, he foregoes the pleasure of killing for the saner pleasure of keeping alive. The second saving factor is this: Wild creatures are singularly humble in their demands. They will take what we reject. They will occupy what we abandon. They will rejoice to inhabit our waste lands and our wildernesses. There is no place so apparently impossible for the habitation of man but can be made into a home for wild creatures. It looks there as if, as civilization advances, man will acquire and keep all the choice localities; and at first by chance, and then deliberately, with mercy premeditated, he will apportion waste lands to the wild children of the woods and the waters and the air.

For a great number of years I have been interested in the matter in question, and have been engaged from time to time in projects of restocking game preserves. If I can tell a few stories relative to this subject, I shall perhaps be most simply accomplishing my object—which is to show that, whether a man owns ten acres or ten thousand, it is wise and just and economic to quarter a portion of his holdings to the ancient inhabitants of the land, that will be glad

enough to use whatever is unsuitable for purposes of man. Strictly, there is no such thing nowadays as waste land. A marsh becomes a mink and a muskrat home; an old rice field becomes a duck preserve; the junglelike growth that follows the felling of big timber becomes a sanctuary for deer and for ruffed grouse; the spouty patch in the cornfield's edge that can never be cultivated will grow cat-tails and witch grass and big briars that will protect the quail when the hunters and the red-tailed hawks are on the scene.

During the hunting season of 1925 I frequently went to a valley in southern Pennsylvania which well illustrates the principle that whatever man deserts Nature reclaims. In this valley, some eighteen miles long and two miles wide, almost every foot, clear up to where the mountain benches begin, used to be under cultivation. But one after one the hillside farms and the creek-bottom pastures have been deserted. People have moved to the near-by towns. In the whole valley now there are not more than eight or ten homes. And Nature, in her quiet, joyous way, has retaken what, centuries ago, in frontier days, was bitterly wrested from her and from the Indians.

As I roamed the deserted valley and the slopes above it I was curiously interested in the manner in which wild things were taking part in the recapture of their ancient home. Here in a deserted orchard, where a few gnarled apple trees still were bearing, deer had been munching the fallen fruit. In this old upland field where some volunteer buckwheat had sprung up, wild turkeys had been foraging. Beside a

pathway leading from a collapsed mountain home to its inevitable spring I flushed two ruffed grouse. In the shellbark trees along the creek—trees that the farm boys used to raid for nuts—gray squirrels were gathering their winter supply of food. In the creek itself, where tame ducks were wont to go vacuum-cleaning, I flushed a score of migrating mallards.

Man comes, it seems, as a destroyer, but no sooner is his power relaxed than the timid legitimate dwellers in the land return to reclaim what they had been obliged to leave. All they seem to want is a bare chance. They cannot occupy and increase in the face of high-power rifles, traps, and shotguns, neither could man. But they are swift and valiant to return when the chance of getting killed is even slightly diminished.

My experience in this wild appealing valley, and experiences elsewhere of a similar nature, have led me to believe that there should be no such thing as waste land. Whatever situations man is too proud or lazy to occupy, wild creatures will humbly rejoice in.

Some places, indeed, are the better for game after man's invasion. For example, the holder of a huge tract of yellow pine in the South told me this:

"Formerly," he said, "when all the big timber was standing, we had not a great many deer on the place. I think the woods were too open; practically the only cover was the broom grass. But eight years ago we cut about a thousand acres of pine. On that land a regular jungle grew up—myrtle, bays, huckleberries, gallberries, sparkleberries, and other brush of many

kinds, much of it overrun with smilax and jasmine vines. As a result, there was ideal cover and to it the deer thronged. However, I noticed that the wild turkeys kept to the big timber. They do not like thickets, for in such places the wildcat and the fox have the best chance to operate against them. Deer will come to cut-over land, but turkeys will leave it until the second growth is fairly well developed."

It frequently happens that a situation that is attractive to wild life can be made positively irresistible merely by a little intelligent adjustment by the owner of the land.

I shall never forget with what amazement I looked upon a duck preserve near Oakley, South Carolina, some thirty miles up the Cooper River. Adjacent to the river were waste rice fields, long since abandoned, over which the tides of a generation had ebbed and flowed. Despite, however, these periodic inundations the general layout of the fields remained unchanged. There were the remnants of the ancient banks, the integrity of which had been partly maintained by the trees and bushes growing along them; there were the ditches and canals, in many cases widened and deepened by the dredging of the tides; there were the expanses of the fields, now grown to marsh and duck oats instead of to rice.

Such landscapes have been familiar to me since boyhood, but I was not prepared for the gorgeous spectacle of the wild life that thronged these fields. Mallards, green-winged and blue-winged teal, pintails, widgeons, wood ducks, a few canvasbacks, and

black ducks in thousands, were joyously feasting, preening themselves, tipping up in the warm shallow water, hailing all passing flocks with the glad tidings that the true paradise for wild fowl had at last been discovered. As I walked down a green bank, to the top of which the limpid water almost brimmed, I flushed a vast concourse. The whole field seemed to rise, yet as quickly settled back again. Many of the ducks flew so lazily and contentedly that I noticed that they hardly drew up their feet under them. In these days of myriads of hunters and the last word in firearms I was frankly amazed to see such a sight, and asked the owner of the place, who was with me, to account for the wild-life vision that I was seeing.

"Three things have done it," he said. "These fields, you see, were worthless to me for planting purposes. But ducks have always come here. I decided first to post it carefully. Then, at a small outlay, I mended the banks and the trunks so that the fields can be made to hold water when once the water has flowed on them. A duck isn't going to light on dry land—not if there's water within reach of his wings. The third thing was the matter of feed. At some clubs rice and corn are fed regularly, but I can't afford to give them the things that keep me alive. I went up to Washington and spent two or three days at the Department of Agriculture finding out just what wild food would grow here—things that the ducks like best. I had recommended to me duck oats, water lilies—you know that the ducks eat the little

potato-like nodules on the roots—and the American lotus. This last is probably the most successful food I have tried. The bloom is like a big mallow, held high above the water; then a seed-holding disk is formed, in a general way like a sunflower; then the seeds come, like hard black acorns. And the ducks are crazy about them. Of course these seeds are shed into the mud when frost comes, and the ducks dive and forage for them.

“Yes, these old fields were worthless, but in these days there is no such thing as waste land if a man will turn over to wild things those parts of his property which he can't use himself. And if he will encourage the wild life just a little he will have it coming in abundance. There are fields just below me here on the river, of the very same character as mine, and they have comparatively few ducks visiting them. Reasonable quiet and protection, water, food—get those three conditions in this part of the country and you will have all the ducks you want.”

This setting aside of sanctuaries, whether done as a private enterprise in conservation or whether done designedly by a state as a public duty, always has the same effect—the immediate and gratifying increase in wild life. But the effect is much more far-reaching than might be imagined. I know huge tracts of wild country, in Pennsylvania, in Virginia, in Maryland, and in the Carolinas, which ten years ago were practically dead as far as game birds and animals are concerned. Now they are alive again, and the magic of this resurrection has been accomplished solely by

the system of public sanctuaries or by the big preserves of private clubs.

Fortunately, game does not appear to distinguish between public and private preserves and sanctuaries; it will come to one as quickly as to another, and will also leave. The deer and the turkeys and the grouse that wander from the protected areas slowly repopulate the desolate hinterlands, and they also afford the humble average hunter with a little sport and with no end of exercise full of exciting promise. I know of a hunting club which, ostensibly organized to kill game, has yet been the greatest game preserver of the region where it exists.

On the Southern coast the club has an ownership of perhaps sixty thousand acres. The place is unfenced; and though it is rigorously protected, no attempt is made to segregate the game within its ample borders. As a result, particularly in the summer when the cover is dense and when the woods are free from hunters, deer and turkeys in great numbers wander far beyond the boundaries of the club lands. The hinterlands, which had been combed of all their game, are once more replenished. The natives, who at first resented the coming of the great club and its exclusive ways, have now learned that a wild turkey for Christmas or for Thanksgiving and a pretty plentiful supply of venison all through the winter are due directly to the club's existence.

A fraternal feeling has come to prevail between the members of the club and their less fortunate neighbours; and it is a feeling which, rightly understood,

is a promise of a new day in American sportsmanship. It is the feeling born of the conviction that game protection by one man or one organization is game increase for other men and other organizations. This club did a rather unique thing for the sake of game preservation, and a sensible thing it was, too. On a deserted plantation that was bought to be added to the club preserve were some eight or ten negro families who were occupying the old slave quarters in the very heart of the deer country of the plantation. The club bought up some good property in a neighbouring negro settlement safely outside the preserve, built there the required number of simple homes and moved the negroes there. They were only too glad to go, for the negro who is not gregarious does not exist.

Some twenty miles west of Gettysburg, on the Lincoln Highway, there is an inn. Within sight of the windows of the inn are the borders of a virgin forest fastness—one of the great game sanctuaries that the State of Pennsylvania has set aside for the use of wild creatures, and indirectly, of course, for the benefit of the hunters of the state. From that beautiful forest one can see trooping, especially in the late afternoon, small herds of whitetail deer, perhaps the most widely distributed of all American big-game animals and, in a way, the most characteristic wild creature of our country. It is heartening, in these days of swift transportation and deadly guns and rifles, while one is at dinner within a stone's throw of the Lincoln Highway, down which heavy traffic roars all the day long, to



Courtesy of U. S. Forest Service

DEER AT THE EDGE OF A WOOD

see genuinely wild creatures timidly stealing out of their coverts to nibble at a farmer's wheat or to browse on the tender green of his choice apple trees. The emotion with which I view such a sight is probably radically different from the farmer's.

Nevertheless, the presence of deer in a civilized community represents a definite triumph. Nor are these creatures pets. They are the real thing.

I remember seeing a huge old stag, the hero of many a thrilling escape on the near-by mountains, calmly munching apples within rifle shot of the hotel! Many of these deer—particularly the old bucks—seem to know quite well when the hunting season begins, and at that time they manifest a decided partiality for the sanctuary itself. Game recognizes a protected area; and though there is some straying and straggling, the sanctuary idea is wholly effective. It is not a bad thing for the sanctuary, for the adjoining orchardists, and for the herds themselves for some deer to be killed each season.

Some twenty-five miles southwest of that inn is the Orquic Valley Sanctuary, a place in which I have spent much time. It is in much wilder country, though a good road runs through it. I knew it years ago, long before the state set it apart as a preserve. Then it was anybody's land, overrun by hunters, often burned out—a desolate wilderness. Now it is beautiful with heavy timber, with a lush undergrowth, musical with a fine trout stream roaring through its dewy coverts, protected from all marauders.

For several years, by some calculations which I

believe to be accurate, I have ascertained that, but for this sanctuary, all the deer and turkeys of that region of the Tuscaroras would have disappeared. They have increased; and the increase, indeed the survival, the sanctuary made possible. On its borders now, every season, hunters have genuine sport; and if what escapes them gets into the preserve they feel that it is just as well. I think that there is a growing sentiment among all hunters that all game should have at least one inviolate place into which it cannot be pursued. A game sanctuary is not only a temporary life preserver, it is a guaranty of the survival of a race.

By all odds the most interesting game sanctuary I know is Bull's Island, one of the barrier group of the Carolina seaboard. Separated from the mainland by many deep salt waterways that wind through a vast sea marsh, it is effectively isolated. Nine miles long, three miles wide at its widest point, heavily wooded, rich in semi-tropical jungles, and having an abundant supply of fresh water, it is most fortunately appointed by Nature as a home for wild life. I believe that there is more game on this island than there is on any area of similar size in America, perhaps in the world; and its presence there is to be accounted for by methods of intelligent protection and sensible encouragement.

I remember walking one afternoon down through the lustrous thickets of this magic isle, and hardly for a moment was wild life out of sight or sound. I

saw five flocks of wild turkeys—there are no foxes on the island—raccoons pacing sedately down the dim pathways aglow with the ruby lights of sunset, flocks of wild ducks speeding toward the reedy flows, and perhaps fifty deer. At one time I had twenty-six in sight, coming out of their daytime coverts to browse on the marsh edges and to roam securely the solitary country of the night. I walked up close to a stag that stood motionless in reeds as tall as his back. His massive neck and his regal head were all of him that showed. As I got too near he crouched slightly, hoping, I think, to be passed by; but then he changed his mind and went bounding off, his great flag erect and jerking from side to side.

Usually, after a day of travel through the wilds a man will have one or two vivid scenes of wild life to recall. On Bull's Island such scenes are bewildering in their number and variety.

Yet twenty years ago there were no turkeys on this preserve. There were few deer. The duck ponds were grown shut with choking aquatic plants. But a little ditching and draining deepened the ponds, so that now, on a midwinter's morning, mallards and black ducks pour into the idyllic lagoons that lie shielded by the virgin pine forests. Protection was all that the deer needed. I suppose there is no animal in the world that, considering its size and importance, responds more certainly to man's encouragement than does the whitetail deer. A barren doe is a rarity, and a great many have twin fawns.

Experts in permutations and combinations have estimated that a buck and a doe will, through their offspring, in fifty years produce thousands of descendants; and this will happen if the hand of man against them is stayed. .

There are so many deer on this island now, and so frequent and fierce are the encounters of the bucks in the mating season, that it is necessary to kill off a certain number of stags every year. The oldest are killed so that the vigour of those in their prime will establish the stamina of the succeeding herds.

The case of the wild turkey is different and it is, I think, an interesting story. The owner of the island brought from the adjacent mainland three wild-turkey eggs, and these were hatched under a hen and raised by her. Fortunately there were one gobbler and two hens. From such a start have come the splendid flocks now on the island. In this connection I do not see why it would not be possible to repopulate with wild turkeys many of those areas which in colonial days had an abundance of these magnificent birds. They have been brought back to Pennsylvania; in some regions in almost incredible numbers. I lay on my ground behind an old chestnut log last autumn in the mountains of Franklin County and carefully counted a flock of forty-three of these great birds. The Adirondacks should have as many turkeys as deer, and intelligent stocking would bring them back. It is not, of course, necessary to start with purely wild stock. A wild gobbler turned loose with six bronze hens will soon populate a wild tract with America's supreme

game bird. Not long ago I was talking with an old mountaineer who complained that every spring his turkey hens wandered off into the hills where the wild gobblers were; and it is a common experience of turkey hunters to kill birds that have markings that unmistakably indicate their relationship to the tame variety.

I have spoken of Bull's Island as an extraordinary sanctuary for wild life; yet, for all its languorous beauty and exotic charm, it is not a good place for human habitation, except perhaps for a few winter months. In the old days it was pirate haunted, and now it has all the drawbacks of a tropical isle. In the sense that it is not a place where men would gladly live it is waste land; yet a veritable paradise for wild life it has become. Practically the same thing holds true for many of the great sanctuaries set aside on the Gulf Coast, the principle of the whole thing apparently being this: Whatever is rejected by man is, or may become, acceptable to wild things.

The earth was anciently theirs; they were here, it seems, before man; and they may survive when he is gone. They are in many ways better equipped for the adventure of living than men are. I sometimes think they are more gallant. Certainly they surpass us in the keenness of every one of their senses. Yet their fate is in our hands.

The idea of always associating the forward march of man with the destruction of all lesser forms of life appears to be giving way now to the saner and kinder idea of preservation. Absurdly simple is the re-

quirement for having beautiful wild life on your place; Don't kill it and don't clean away with Dutch immaculacy every vestige of that wild home that Nature provides. These wild things live humbly, drawing sustenance from Nature's own ample bosom. We must not rob them of their homes.

IV

VOICES OF THE NIGHT

THIS is really the story of how I came to fall in love with the Night.

The post office was seven miles from our house; and we had no rural delivery. It therefore fell to me to bring the mail. But ere it reached our remote country, it had to come forty-two miles through the woods, in the days before cars. It therefore reached us at dark. Leaving home at twilight, I used to ride the lonely woodland miles for the mail, returning after nightfall. Not a house was on the road. The way led past all sorts of shuddery places—dim lagoons, glimmering swamp edges, black pine thickets. Moreover, I was only seven years old when this began, and my imagination had been filled with stories the plantation negroes told me of hags, of hants, of blood-sucking bats as big as turkeys, of nameless horrors that stalked abroad in the shadows out of the old plantation burying-grounds. Young as I was, I felt a desperate injustice about all this: a boy might be a mail-carrier at night—or he might be told ghost stories; but to be a rider in the dark and a semi-believer in all sorts of hants is too heavy a cross for

a youngster to carry. Fourteen miles every night except Sunday I rode; seven in the twilight and seven in the pitch darkness or the eerie starlight, with now and then some encouragement from the silver searchlight of the moon. I saw much that was interesting; I heard much that sounded to me exceedingly spooky; I felt much of fear and wonder. My initial reaction was one of dread.

Distinctly my first impressions of night were those of any boy or girl. I was apprehensive of its mystery; I was glad to escape from the strange touch of its velvet hands, the haunting beauty and stillness and loneliness of it all. I remember that once in a storm a low limb swept me from my horse some three miles from home. My regard for the darkness may be appreciated from the fact that I got home that night a little ahead of schedule time. I dreaded the sounds I did not understand; I feared some of those that I did. The bushes, I thought, used to take outlandish shapes; would lurk dull, or dart spitefully out; they seemed forever dealing with shadowy subterfuge. The huge yellow pines seemed sighing *at* me. In those early years I was no lover of the night. But we change as we grow older, I hope usually for the better; and often the aversions of youth become the attractions of our later years.

All my life, it seems, ever since those boyhood years, I have been obliged to be out late at night: on the plantation caring for the stock, and coming home from all sorts of expeditions into the forest or out on the river, continuing those rides for the mail

under the stars and the choiring pines; going out to investigate some sudden outcry among the dogs, and lingering to become acquainted with what Whitman calls "the huge and thoughtful night." From fearing her, I began to be interested in her, and then to love her. Darkness and I have long since been intimates; and I think she has revealed more to me of Life's secret than day has divulged. It may be that some "men love darkness better than light because their deeds are evil"; but I have learned that in the night are much beauty, and voices of poignant appeal to the heart, and silences full of mystic meaning. Always her white stars seen to me to be rising on immortality, her beautiful dark tide setting toward eternity. Always the night seems to be trying to show me patiently, with the infinite tenderness and the wistful love of a mother, something of the truth of the mighty trinity of existence—life, love, and death. Tenderly she keeps singing to my heart, reaching for my hand—as if she loved me, and as if I were in one world, she in another.

One of the quaint appealing voices of the night is the lyric concert of the frogs. It may continue all night, especially if there is promise of rain. It matters not what they are singing: it is enough to know that they are wildwood minstrels, and that they enjoy themselves immensely. They have a good time. And they vary their programme. I used to rein in my horse by a starlit savanna to listen to them. They begin to warn a mythical traveller of the danger of riding through their quaking domain.

"Knee-deep! Knee-deep! Knee-deep!" pipe the elfin trebles.

"Little deeper! Little deeper! Little deeper!" shrill the sopranos.

"Thigh-high! Thigh-high! Thigh-high!" the altos sing.

"More deep! More deep! More deep!" the baritone warn.

"You'd better go round! You'd better go round! You'd better go round!" thunders the profound bass of the old bulls.

Whenever I hear frogs singing, I know that, even though dimly and obscurely, their hearts must be feeling the same kind of joyous utterance as do ours when we sing our festive carols and our hearthstone melodies. Somehow, hearts have an infallible way of being hearts, whether wild or human, and whether they dwell in proud cities or in lonely marshes. All that is needed to make a song authentic is that it must spring from the heart. It may come from a sidewalk of New York or from a "haunt of coot and hern." What makes music and poetry is sincerity.

I remember hearing one night a sound that has ever since haunted my memory. Twenty feet above the ground I was at the time, on a platform that I had built among the sweet-smelling branches of a long-leaf pine. I had constructed it there in order to make observations at night. Below me was an area of white sand, a half-acre in extent. Long had I known this place as a nocturnal rendezvous for deer; it lay midway between a forbidding swamp where the deer spent

the day, and a deserted plantation, where at night these shy wanderers loved to forage for tender green browsing, for mushrooms, and for certain peaches that the neglected orchard persisted in bearing. Many a time at twilight I mounted the platform, which was only about a mile from home, to watch through the moonlight hours not only for deer, but for whatever else in wild life the lonely woodlands would divulge.

After having waited an hour or more, I heard a distinct and mysterious sound. I was sure that a bush cracked; and I thought I heard a faint and rather eerie call. The lonely woods lay marbled in the transfiguring moonlight; even the tall pines had ceased their mournful harping. It was so silent that every sound should have been distinct; but since we are accustomed to associate sight with sound, it is hard to be guided by sound alone. Now I heard something brush sedulously through a green myrtle. Then into the patch of sand walked three deer. So quiet, so shadowy, so vividly unreal they were that they might easily have been taken for spirits. Indeed, one of the wonders of the night is the artless delicacy, the silent elegance, the felicitous stillness with which wild creatures travel the country of the silvery shadows. It seems the more remarkable because the world itself is then so quiet, and the moving about of such a crude creature as a man is readily detected. But deer have a fairy way of gliding along, of floating over obstacles, of crossing moonlit stretches of country with a certain beauteous stealth that has upon it the bloom

of magic and of wonder. Wary wanderers were these three. The buck, with a curious air of defiant yet timid alertness, alternately held his head high, winding the dewy night air; or held it down, apparently snuffing the ground. One doe stood beside him, the picture of shadowy gentleness. Another doe was behind, one ear cocked backward and one turned forward. I saw her turn her beautiful head. She seemed listening to something in the bushes through which she had just come. She lowered her head. I heard her bleat softly. She was answered by one of the most pathetic and appealing sounds in all Nature—the bleating of a little fawn. A bush across the path had probably delayed it; but now into the clear moonlight it stole, up to its mother's side. She muzzled it with tenderest affection. The tiny fawn at once began to nurse the mother with astonishing avidity. I smiled over the human nature of it all: the lost child, the mother's recovery of it, her fondling it and feeding it. Though robbed by this domestic incident of something of its quality of the spirituelle, the scene remained romantic. And the call of the little fawn I shall always remember as the sweetest and gentlest voice of the night that I ever heard.

As quietly as the deer had come they vanished—faded wraith-like into moonlight-tinted borders of a sombre, beautiful thicket. Though the place was dense they made hardly a sound going through it. Deer are masters of the art of delicately insinuating themselves. When these attractive visitors were gone, I listened for other voices of the night. High over the pines I

heard the thin sweet music of wild ducks' wings. They were speeding toward the delta, rushing along under the stars, knowing exactly where to go and how to go. A man carries a compass on his wrist; but I think a wild thing has one in his brain. We calculate; Nature's children seem to know.

Close behind the platform ran a wide white sandy road, dipping down into a dewy swamp. Up this road I now saw a wild thing coming, a small creature about as big as a cat. I thought it might be a mink, or a small raccoon, or a half-grown wildcat. While I was trying to identify it, I heard a sound in a big pine near me, and silhouetted against the sky I caught sight of a stately black shape. The sound was as faint as a mysterious sigh; the shape was that of a monstrous bird. It had alighted softly on a bare limb, and clearly discernible I could see the baleful glow of prodigious eyes. I knew it to be a great horned owl and in another moment I judged the wild thing on the road to be its intended victim. To me it appeared that the owl had every advantage: his wings, his speed, his silent approach, his terrible talons. But the lone traveller over the sands was soon to show me that he was not without resources of his own.

In the soft moonlight the silky fur of the animal gleamed. I noticed that its tail was long and furred, its legs short, its gait awkward. The newcomer was a half-grown otter, wandered, no doubt, from the near-by river. An otter is erratic in its movements, and often it travels overland. Whether or not the big owl identified his prey I could not tell; but now in grim

silence he launched himself downward through the moonlit void.

The otter saw the dread shape coming. He threw himself back sharply, his mouth open in a snarl. The owl's talons were wide for the fatal grip. The otter, shrinking himself, threw his body to one side, and with one paw clutched upward, he struck out valiantly at his antagonist. The baffled owl reared himself backward on wide-arched wings, and in a moment alighted on the sands. As well as I could observe in the moonlight, he was the picture of astonished dignity. The wily otter did not stay to argue the business. Curling his lip in a snarl of defiance, he backed away into a bushy drain that ran beside the road. The horned owl ignominiously took wing, leaving behind him the evidence of his defeat; for on the gleaming sands lay three dusky feathers. A half hour later I heard him hooting mournfully. He seemed trying to publish the fact that life is a cruel thing. One's dinner would not even permit itself to be caught!

Not far from the platform, on another evening, I heard a wildcat scream. It was the only time I ever heard this strange cry. I had been sitting on an old pine log for more than an hour, watching the graceful gambols of a pair of fox squirrels. Darkness had then come on, but I had lingered on the swamp edge, a waylayer in the shadows, trying to stalk both the fugitives and the followers of that wild region. I had heard a sound in a deep canebrake near me; then the still evening was suddenly rent wide by the cat's scream. It cried only once. Once is enough. In the

mountains of North Carolina long ago I heard a panther scream; or at least the weird sound I heard was so described by the mountaineer who was with me. But this cry sounded wilder, fiercer, more elemental in savagery. I do not think it is often given, for the bay-lynx is one of the most craftily silent of all living things. But when it does shriek, the sound is terrible and memorable. For my part, it is a voice of the night with which I can very well dispense. Yet it is a perfectly natural utterance for the heartless brigand that gives it.

Most of the voices of the night are alluring and beautiful. Night herself is highly fastidious. Her reign has exquisiteness about it: dewy moonlight and tremulous stars, natural fragrances. Nature never appears to have any white-light brilliance about her, any jazz, any artifice. The day is a good deal of a barbarian, blatant, obvious, masculine. The night has a delicate reticence, a shadowy avoidance, a virgin immaculacy. She seems the source of music; feminine, wise, compassionate. Her companionship makes the mind and heart reflective, sensitive to all that is spiritual.

I've mentioned the horned owl. To me he is really, despite his somewhat villainous character as a marauder, the most interesting bird of the night. An incident will explain why he appeals to me as being rather more than a bird. Long since, the negroes have inclined to the belief that he is the reincarnation of a person. With true oriental felicity they have embodied both the sorcery of his character and the

strangeness of his lonely call in their pet name for him—"Hiddle-diddle-dee." Haunter of the mouldering swamp and of the funeral-tressed pines, he seems to be the very soul of the lost wood, the solitary forest, the cypress-sentinelled morass.

But this is the incident. For some years our plantation home was unoccupied. I then returned to it, to find that the house had been encroached upon in an actual sense by the woods, and in a spiritual sense by a glamour of natural wildness. So thronged was the ancient home with memories, with shadowy foot-falls, with vanished faces, that I found it hard to sleep there. Immediately before the house is a great live-oak that General Washington, on his visit to the South, especially asked to have spared, the tree then being a mere sapling. Now it is a gnarled and mighty oak. One or two of the limbs are dead; and from dead live-oak the bark always falls, leaving the wood stark gray. Two of these gaunt limbs pointing skyward had been chosen, I discovered, by two horned owls. Perched there, overlooking the house and the fields over which as a boy I had endlessly roamed, they carried on, "in the dead vast and middle of the night," a most amazing conversation. The note of these birds has something about it singularly wistful and melancholy. Being slightly ventriloquistic, it is all the more mysterious. Its charm lies chiefly in its remote and baffling quality. I shall try to give a fragment of this weird gossiping, heard as I lay awake at midnight, with a misty rain falling, and with no other human being anywhere near me.

"Hoot-a-loot, hoot-a-loot," says one owl, with a touch of infinite tenderness in his tone.

"Loot, hoot-a-loot," answers the other with wistful gentleness,

"Hoot, toot, hoot-a-loot," the first says, in a tone of exquisite modulation, more elegant in expression than much human conversation.

"Loot, hoot, loot," comes the reply, the sound fading like dying music, drifting mystically off into the far away and the long ago.

There is nothing loud and challenging about this singular converse such as there is in the bold hooting of the barred owl; nor is there anything tremulous and querulous about it as there may be in the call of the screech-owl. Here we have deep philosophical conversation. Plato and Socrates are talking over the universe. Sir Thomas Browne and Richard Burton are discussing "Urn Burial" and "The Anatomy of Melancholy." No wonder the plantation negro, who is an expert at judging character, human or animal, calls this bird the "Hiddle-diddle-dee"! Depend upon a negro to get a wild creature's "number," and also to supply him with an appropriate name!

There is another night voice that has an especial charm for me. I hear it chiefly in July, just after the hay and the wheat are cut, when the fields are changing their aspect, when the first hint that the year is waning begins to appear. This is the whimpering sweet whistle of the upland plover. He nests in clover fields and in pastures; and he rears his brood early. By the first of July the young are able to take wing. Almost

at once the birds become restless; and I hear them on still summer nights flying under the stars, fluting a haunting human note. Their delicate long wings are really superb pinions; for these fine birds winter on the pampas of the Argentine, and in Patagonia. In its melting romantic quality, I do not think the night whistling of this plover can be surpassed by the note of any other bird. I am not certain what some writers mean by "communion with Nature." But perhaps to lie at evening on a bare little hill in a peaceful valley conscious of the utter friendship of the grass, conscious of the gentleness of the sailing clouds, and to hear the upland plover's visionary voice, aloft in the heavens, is to come close to the heart of things. I know not whereelse, if not beneath the fragrant flowery breasts of Nature, one can hear beating the heart of the Eternal. Communion with Nature is, I take it, sensing the nearness of God. It is accepting hope and love. No wonder that it has power to heal even that despair of medicine—weariness of heart. Always, I think, we must remember that Nature has the power to take as well as the power to give. There are, for example, in the night, certain of God's highwaymen. There are freebooters who rob us of all that we should not carry. The average person is a caravan of cares. One star will rob me of doubt; the dusk wind in the pines will steal away my fear; a tall oak, shivering sweetly in some little breeze and shedding odorous dew, can take away anxiety. . . . The agate of the heart can be melted by a sunbeam, the anger of the spirit can be transmuted into love by a violet. I won-

der if the world is not full of these good highwaymen of God, lying in ambush to plunder us of the burdens that we have no business carrying?

I believe it is not generally known that woodcock have a decided tendency to move by night. Many a time, while crossing a plantation field or an old pasture just at dark, I have heard and seen woodcock fleet by on faintly whistling wings, their speedy and enigmatic flight in no way baffled by darkness and by all those obstructions that the night conceals. Judging by the ease and alacrity of their movements, and by the way in which their low flight takes them through difficult thickety country, I am sure that their eyesight must be exceedingly good in the dark. Indeed, the woodcock's eye is a wonderful organ, both in appearance and in power. Set oddly in the side of the bird's head, it affords him hindsight as well as foresight. I remember on one occasion trying to catch a mother woodcock on her nest by crawling up behind her through the brush; and always I would be aware that her great lustrous dark eyes were watching my approach. She usually left her eggs when my hand was within two or three feet of her

The most impressive flight of woodcock I ever saw came at night; I heard many more in the darkness than could be seen, but the next morning revealed what a great number the storm of the night before had literally blown in. The afternoon had been bleak; a keen wind set in from the north at dusk; and the trees were soon creaking with sleet. At such a time I used always to be abroad to care for the stock, and

incidentally to observe how the wild things were taking care of themselves. In the late twilight I was crossing a big cornfield on an elevation above the river when I heard several woodcock pass me, and dimly discerned their hurtling forms speeding southward toward the pine forests on the far side of the plantation. Northward from us thousands of these fine birds winter; and a spell like this one brings them down. Cold freezes the ground in which they are obliged to probe for food, and when a cold wave comes, they simply fly southward until they clear the freezing area. On the bare hilltop I had an excellent chance to see this remarkable flight of woodcock. Scores and scores passed me. Silent they were, save for the whistling of their wings. Good barometers are they, warning the stock-raiser of bad weather coming.

That night the sleet turned to snow, and the next morning the world was white. I found the woodcock in a rather pathetic plight, many of them so benumbed that they were easily caught. I got some negro children to help me, and together we gathered in a great many. These we put in a bare room in the house, the warmth of which thawed them out. A fire was kindled in the chimney; a couple of big holly trees were stood in corners to make the birds feel more at home; and ere long they were strutting about like tiny turkey gobblers, lowering their gorgeous buff wings and spreading their fantails. By another day the snow was gone, and these captives were released to their fragrant wilds.

Certain voices of the night which have actually kept me awake are, I regret to state, rather of the vacuum-cleaning variety. I mean the wild ducks. Just across the river from home are waste rice fields, thousands of acres in extent. Here are reed-hung creeks, wampee-choked ditches, broad stretches of duck-oats and lotus. The wildfowl wintering in that region fly down to the sandbars at the mouth of the river to spend the day; at twilight they pour back into these old fields. Myriads deploy over the delta, mallards, black ducks, widgeons, teal, and wood-ducks. If the weather is stormy, they may spend the whole day in the fields and in the drowsy water-courses that insinuate their genial way through the lonely morasses. But always they are there at night, and a deadlocked presidential convention is pacific to the uproar they set up. There are two distinct sets of noises made by these feeding ducks; first, the glad-hand calls and cries; secondly, the suction method of feeding. The sound resembles, I am told, the one made by a full-bearded Bolshevik carefully eating Soviet soup in such a manner as to strain out the germs and the arsenic. Imagine five thousand mallards feeding on a tidal flat not more than a couple of acres in area, and you understand why a would-be sleeper a mile away cannot get in touch with slumber. There are many soft and contented calls, and every now and then an old drake will at the top of his voice propose a toast to some reigning beauty, in tones quite as hearty as those of a politician describing the decay of our country. "Quack! Quack!

Quack!" he will yell hilariously, tossing decorum to the winds. Listening from far away, I always want to chuckle when I hear the humanness of that robust guffaw.

From long and careful observation I am persuaded that there is at least one bird that sings in its sleep. Often in the dead of night, from some still grassfield or moonlit pasture, I have heard the field sparrow shrill its tiny evanescent song. It is not really so much a song as it is a single trill. Usually it is given but once, though in the daytime it is repeated endlessly. It touches the heart to hear this tiny wild chorister lift his voice in the vast cathedral of the night. I really think he is asleep, or just momentarily awake. It sounds as if a moonbeam, fairily touched like a tiny harpsichord, had been made to vibrate elfin melody.

I remember coming home late one night from a visit to a mountaineer's cabin, and my pathway led through a little valley where there were almost as many clumps of trees as fields. I am not sure what weakness of character the practice indicates, but I can seldom cross a stile or an old stake-and-rider fence without sitting on it for a while, to look and to listen. On this evening there was much to hear. Back in the lonely hills I heard a fox barking; and his wild call soon had an answer from a misty hollow a good mile away. Locust blooms were scenting the edges of the woods; and through this dewy fragrance a whippoorwill was calling. It was his love song; and it had about it a quality that belongs essentially to the

night, a voicing of elemental beauty and wildness, uttering the mystery and enchantment that are the Night's.

From boyhood I have had a passionate yearning to see and to feel the loveliness of Nature; and much of my wandering has been purposefully into wastelands and wildernesses. I have been after life's Answer. In fragmentary yet thrilling fashion I think I have heard it. Any heart that listens for it amid the stillness and beauty of God's world will hear it. Blind, helpless, hungry, clambering are our hearts. They want to hear some great heart beat which will not only account for the beating of their own but will give them a sense of sustaining love and care. And what is the Answer? It is to hear the voice of the Eternal speaking in Beauty. I think I hear the Answer when I smell dewy locust blooms softly falling in the night wind; when I hear the whippoorwill's ghostly sweet voice; and I listen to the tiny trill of the field sparrow, his little heart so joyous that he has to sing even in his sleep.

A very different song of the night is one by an old acquaintance of mine; this is a mocking bird, a true artist, since his temperament is almost iridescent in its changefulness. Tyrannical in driving all other birds from the garden, he redeems himself by his song. Let us say that it is a night in late April. A green darkness curtains the warm and fragrant world. Silver lances thrust silently through the cedars announce that the moon is coming. It is the signal for the mockingbird to begin. He does not rush raucously

into song like a camp-meeting baritone. Consciously a master, he steps delicately out of his smilax-woven chalet, and standing on the gleaming vines he utters a few soft warm notes of rejoicing prelude. Then he makes a sudden leap into the air on wings that are widespread, descending a moment later on his moon-lit bower. Rising again, he circles deftly, apparently no effort either in his flight or his song, pouring forth a wild flood of music. He seems to be singing of love's triumph over time and death; he tells us of the fulfilment of heart's desire.

There's a magical voice of the night that is called "the growing of the corn." The very description long ago appealed to my imagination; and many a time I have thought that I heard that mystic music. Not long ago I went trout-fishing, and was at the stream long before daybreak. I sat on a fence to await the coming of light. Farmlands and meadows, misty pastures and distant mountains slept under mild moonlight. There was no wind. Immediately before me stretched a sixty-five-acre cornfield, the largest stalks in which were just beginning to shoot the tassel. I listened for the growing of the corn, and I heard it. Low and sweet and lustrous was the sound—all mid-summer's sweetness made audible. The great green blades, as far as I could see, glimmered in the moonshine. Hale odours breathed from the damp earth. Winy fragrances were exhaled from the stalwart stalks. Faintly I heard a magic movement, a breathless stirring, a still rejoicing in life, a joyous music. It might have been a vagrant night breeze; but I

like to believe, as did the poet-farmer who first described that ecstatic sound of a summer's night, that it was "the growing of the corn."

Voices of the night! They have a music that we do not hear by day; a meaning and a message for the heart. For us the stars should have a language, and the silence of the night should be eloquent. Emanuel Kant declared that the two great wonders of the universe are the starry heavens without and the moral law within. It is at night that both of these wonders are most apparent to us. To some almighty wand wildflowers and worlds make response; and human hearts are likewise so sceptred. Darkness and dewiness and solemn radiance mark the cloistered reign of Night; and her voices speak to our spirits infallibly; whether in the singing bird, or in the beauty of the constellations, or in the growing of the corn, or in the pines their vespers chanting.

V

THE PHANTOM OF THE FOREST

FOUR little foxes, four little fluffy balls of fur and young rascality, were having a pillow fight right in the front parlor! Their mother and father were, of course, away from home; and, like any other enterprising youngsters, they were taking advantage of relaxed household discipline.

Bowered in a sweet-smelling wilderness were they—beside the upheaved roots of a hurricane-thrown tree. All around, as far as the eye could see, were thickets of sweet myrtle, scrub pine, gall-berries, hollies, sparkleberries. Even the sunshine looked shy as it stole into this remote sanctuary.

I was in a pine tree about thirty feet from the den. I had an old board set across two low limbs; and from the seat thus made I could watch the antics of the wild family, the home of which I had, by a happy chance, discovered some weeks earlier.

While crossing a broomsedge field I had started the old female fox, had watched the direction she took, had followed her with hound on a leash, and so had come upon the den, far back under the upturned roots of the prostrate pine. The little cubs must have been born a few days after that time; and I thought it

would be possible to watch them playing in the balmy spring sunshine before their wilderness home.

On this particular morning the world was emerging roseate from its bath of dew. In the warm air happy mated birds were warbling like aërial rivulets. A scented sea wind made the tall yellow pines murmur and wave. There were many sights and sounds to distract me; but I had come into this wildwood to watch these foxes. And they were worthy of my attention.

I climbed into my pine before sunrise, and then there was no stirring at the den. But with the sunlight's flaring through the dew-tasselled woodland, I saw an elfin face appear at the aperture between two pine roots. There is, I think, no creature that has so charming and mischievous a face as a little fox. The face of a fawn is almost pathetic in its delicate beauty; that of a little raccoon is almost laughable in its ancient urchin wisdom. But a little fox radiates a childish joy that is all the more attractive because it has the elfin grace that belongs to things essentially wild. These children of the wastelands, especially those that are hunted much, have a certain fairy lure wholly denied to barnyard folk.

Around the mouth of the den were some old chicken wings, some polished bones, and some other telltale relics—these being in a tiny arena that the young foxes evidently used as a play yard. Out into this open space one of the little mischief-makers stole. He eyed the world with a child's spacious, glad acceptance; yet he seemed delicately set on springs ready to dart to safety in a second.

Three others now joined him swiftly and noiselessly. One grabbed up a chicken wing and shook it in his mouth teasingly, as if saying, "You can't get this away from me!" The three others took the dare, and in a moment chicken feathers, tiny fur-tipped ears, sprawling feet, ruffled tawny little backs, lovely fluffy tails, all were mingled in a wild mêlée, and from the feathers flying it reminded me of the kind of pillow fights my brothers and I used to have when choice opportunity offered.

They snarled, they buffeted one another at random, they forgot all about "sides" and went after it pell-mell. Now and then, for a flashing instant or two, one would rear himself up on his hind legs, put up his "dukes," and bid defiance to his brothers and to the world in general.

The youngsters were simply having a royally good time—when suddenly they froze, each in the posture in which his fear had caught him. Then they made a wild, incontinent break for the hole of the den. Such scampering! Of course all of them "made" the aperture at the same moment. Worse confusion! And for me a glimmering vision of wildly waving hind legs and foreshortened, frantically bobbing tails. But the babies manfully managed the mighty squeeze. No sooner had they entered the den than they faced about, and there were four appealing little faces wedged at the mouth, unwilling to miss a single glimpse of this fascinating, thrilling experience called Life!

The cause of all their trouble was that Mother had

come home; and her foraging had evidently been in vain. Plainly, she was in a disappointed and, do I dare to say, feminine mood. Petulantly, she looked about, eyed her palpitating offspring with a certain misgiving and disinterest; nosed among the tattered feathers; then sat down disconsolately on her haunches. One by one to her now stole her little ones. She seemed not to see them. She had nothing for them. They snuffed around hopefully for a moment; then they went to their playing again, rolling and snarling and stirring up the dust and feathers.

Suddenly the mother made a quick movement forward. Her balled right forefoot struck one of the cubs smartly on the ear. Another one got the same medicine. The two others escaped. Again there was a dash for the hole. But I noticed that when once they were in the den, though they peered forth, it was with a real apprehension, and they did their looking from a cautiously deep distance beyond the hole. I could barely discern their sorrowful urchin faces—much wiser than they had been ere this late parental discipline had fallen upon them.

I used to love to watch that family, and to tolerate it—despite the disappearance of my chickens, quail, and an occasional turkey. I believe I learned a little of the family life of the fox; and in a way it is almost comically human.

But it is rather of the mature fox that I would speak. Has he a right to his legendary reputation? Is he as sly as we always say he is? Has he in his nature an almost supernatural evasiveness, rendering

him, though he may live almost in a man's back yard, something of a myth and an illusion? The best answer I can make is merely to recount some anecdotes of experiences I have had with foxes, both in the woods and as tamed at home, and let the reader draw his own conclusions.

My introduction to foxes had a somewhat dramatic element and I received from it an impression that I have never lost, an impression that the fox is daring in the most winning way; is as astute as legend would have him to be; and is in an indefinable manner the very spirit of the silent, haunting, mysterious night.

I had been shooting ducks, I was at the tender age of seven, but that was in no degree unusual. On a plantation a boy has to learn to do many things. I was six when I had my first gun. At my first shot, the thing kicked me flat in an old cotton row. But I did not lose heart; and the following year I was going out on the delta to shoot mallards.

On this particular night the negro foreman and I had gone together; his bag was seven, and mine two. Proud of these big greenhead drakes I was; and I hung them on a nail on the back porch, a nail high above the reach of even a hungry hound. The porch, I might add, is large, and some nine feet from the ground.

About an hour later, while I was in the dining room telling my mother about my adventure, and while she was wondering how she would ever get the delta-mud off my trousers, I heard something fall. Of course I thought of my precious mallards. Taking a

lantern, I went to the back door and opened it. On the floor of the porch lay my ducks, and beside them stood a big gray fox, his eyes glinting in the lantern shine. As soon as he made me out he turned, ran down the steps, turned again, as if loath to leave the prey that he had pulled down from the nail, and stood there in the dim light—a mysterious shape of the darkness, a vivid shadow, a weird palpitation out of the heart of the lonely forest that surrounded our South Carolina home.

Rather gingerly I retrieved my ducks and brought them indoors; but that night I dreamed of foxes, and ever since then they have meant to me something of that spirit of the night, of lonely darkness, of sorcery and witchery.

For a great many years I used, on the plantation, to hunt foxes on moonlit winter nights. I never carried a gun; and I always went on foot. In that region, when winter rains come, they sink quickly through the white sand; and down the old roads and by-paths that form a cross-road puzzle in the wild lands between the plantations I used to get about with considerable ease. I wasn't so much after killing the foxes; but it was thrilling to be in the great pine lands in the moonlight, listening to an old hound unravel a mazy trail, and waiting in some glimmering road to get a sight of the fox.

It was while thus waiting one night that I saw a gray fox execute a masterpiece of strategy. I was in a moon-blanching road, overhung on one side by sweet-smelling canopies of smilax and pine; on the other

side was an old rail fence zigzagging lazily through sparse undergrowth. Beyond the fence was an open field.

Seeing the fox coming up the road in the moonlight—he looks very small at night, and he travels in ghostly silence—I stepped beside a pine to conceal myself. When quite near me, the fox turned to the right and jumped the fence, heading across the old field. I started forward to see the direction that he was taking. To my surprise, I saw him coming back, almost on a double. Reaching the fence, he jumped to the top rail, and ran along the top panel for three rail lengths; then he jumped down into the shrubbery and reappeared in the road. Down this he ran lightly, deliberately, with a certain cool assurance that he had made a puzzle for his pursuer to solve. In a short time the hound came up, and I watched him carefully to see how disconcerted he would be by the fox's old manœuvre.

This dog was old and slow and sagacious. He took the turn toward the fence, crossed it, went out into the moonlit field, came back—and then climbed in teetery fashion upon the top rail of the fence! All the time he was mouthing audibly, almost lapping up the scent. He couldn't hold the top rail, but fell off—fortunately on the left side. It was his turn then to make a manœuvre; he took a couple of circles, struck the trail, and vanished down the road. But the delay had been a matter of five minutes; and by that time the fox was a mile or so away.

On another occasion I saw an old male fox execute

a bit of strategy of which Harold Osborne, the high jumper, would be proud. It happened in broad daylight, so that I could watch the thing exactly. I was waiting on a deer stand. There was a slight, soggy snowfall on the ground, an unusual occurrence for the Carolina coastal country. Brightly the sun glistened on this white mantle, and rayed sparkingly from the dripping needles of the pines. Before me was a broad, sandy road, and beyond that a fence—woven-wire for five feet, then a space of about ten inches, then a single strand of barbed wire—strung taut to keep cattle from jumping. In that country there's a saying that a fence must be "horse-high, bull-strong, and pig-tight."

I was expecting to see the drivers send out a buck to me, and to see him sail blithely over so paltry an obstruction as a six-foot fence. Instead, I saw a fox coming, scurrying over the snow, worried, I could tell, from the earnest look on his face and the odd manner in which he kept losing his footing over this new kind of track on which he was running. Straight for me he came, and at full speed. I wondered how he would negotiate the puzzling fence.

"Not a moment stopped or stayed he," as Poe would have said. I think the fox had done this thing before. At full speed he took his leap; in mid-air he turned his body gracefully, so that his extended feet and legs were horizontal with the ground, nicely entered the aperture between the top of the woven wire and the taut barbed strand, sidled through in this flying fashion, righted himself in air, and came

down with deft precision in the road. Gazing about craftily for a moment, he trotted off into a glistening bay thicket. He looked satisfied. A fox always feels better after he has put a fence between himself and his pursuer. Somehow, I admired his little high-jumping stunt so much that I did not molest the handsome rascal.

On another occasion I saw a fox do a thing which perhaps called for a good deal more sagacity. I was driving up cattle in the woods, having with me a half-dozen dogs of nondescript breed. Pariah dogs I think they are called in India; we call them "yaller" dogs. In a particularly wild stretch of lonely broomsedge country, dotted here and there with pines, and with certain melancholy wrecks of trees that a storm had crashed to earth, the dogs got after a semi-wild boar. The creature ran like a deer, a tall gray brute, masterful and hideous. He headed my way; and I was trying to decide whether the adage about discretion being the better part of valour was true when a movement in front of the onrushing boar caught my attention.

It was a fox, stealing swiftly and craftily out ahead of the charging circus. The *mêlée* had evidently aroused him from his bed in the broomsedge. I caught a glimpse of his face, and finding it thoughtful I knew he didn't intend to be hustled on in front of that oncoming rout. Reaching a fallen log, he paused beside it, his front paws on it. Thus elevated, he looked over the situation with the swift appraisal of an artist in vital stratagems. Near us was another fallen

log; this one, wrenched off splinteringly some four feet from the ground, was still clinging to its stump. The fox saw this, darted toward it, ran up its easy incline, and then sat calmly down on top of the stump to permit the silly hurricane of boar and dogs to go madly by him. I, who had been swiftly wondering what I had better do myself, had just cause to admire Sir Reynard's superior intellect.

With a spirit of superb, haughty indifference the fox sat on the stump and watched the boar and the dogs go by; he watched me, too, make a few sudden, awkward dodges. At sight of me he crouched, but made no wild break for liberty. A master in the delicate art of effacing himself, he merely made it appear that he did not exist.

Toward dogs, I think, a fox often has a certain scornful condescension. He may belong to the dog family, but decidedly he has the subtle orientalism of the cat. To my mind, the fox moves in a mental orbit outside the dog; he has a power deftly to insinuate himself through the world. It would hardly be possible for a fox to do anything awkward or clumsy. He may get caught; but even in an extremity he will be graceful. People say that a fox steals, and he does; but his whole life is one long purloining. He thieves for a living. And he steals his way through life. Denied, perhaps, the downright deliberate virtues, he has elegance, diplomacy, delicacy of perception, finesse of behaviour.

If I saw and interpreted the thing correctly, one of the most remarkable manœuvres I ever saw a fox

perform came off one day in early March, when I had gone out into the woods to see how many fox squirrels I could count on the redbud maple trees. At that time of year these fine squirrels (most of them are gray, but I have seen not a few jet-black ones) will throng to these budded maples and feed on the delicate bloom. I remember one day going for a mile or so up a woodland watercourse, counting fourteen redbud trees, and seeing one or more fox squirrels in every one—and not a single squirrel anywhere else.

In the sunshine on an old bank I sat down to watch a black squirrel among the red blossoms; steeped there in sunshine, with parula warblers singing in the high pines, with bluebirds carolling on the wing under the calm azure sky, I wondered if anyone could be more happy and contented than I.

Then the joyous song-filled air was broken by the voice of a trailing hound. He was coming my way. I expected to see a deer dodging artfully before him; but after a few minutes I saw a fox, his beautiful brush bobbing airily. He was running in characteristic fashion, now pausing to look and to listen, now stealing through low bushes, now running the full length of a prostrate pine log, now changing his direction with wise wilfulness, then thoughtfully coming back to his course. This business of getting away from a dog was evidently, with this fox, a very common and tiresome necessity. From his direction, he was going to pass quite close to me.

Near me was the deep watercourse that I had been following to find the squirrels. Its edges were swampy;

and the stream's channel at this point was some twelve feet wide. The black water did not look inviting, and I wondered idly just how the fox was going to cross. A giant pine had been hurled over the stream by a hurricane, the log lying some six feet above the stream, caught in that position by the slope of the banks. It was a pretty natural bridge and I was not surprised to see the fox make for it and run out nimbly on it.

But I was by no means prepared for the bit of strategy that followed. Midway across the stream was a tiny island, around which the black swamp water glimmeringly flowed in ebon beauty. The giant tree crossed the stream just above this island.

When the fox reached the middle of the log, he paused, looked back, his face seeming to express grim amusement over the plight into which he knew he was now going to put the hound, and then quite evidently got ready for a leap. Lithely he jumped down to the green island; and then another leap took him, not to the farther side of the stream, but back to the bank which he had just left. Yet he landed at a point far off the trail that the hound would follow down to the tree; and with that silent evasiveness that is a part of his personality, Sir Reynard vanished down the edge of the lonely watercourse.

After a few moments the hound came up. He took the trail to the log, down its length, paused in the middle, looked about, then went on to the farther side. But he ceased to give tongue. He ranged about sagaciously and faithfully; but there was no scent to

follow. I cannot be assured of what was in his heart, but surely he must have felt himself swindled.

Dogs are not unaccustomed to losing a trail unaccountably, as when they come to a point in a wild turkey's trail at which the bird has suddenly taken flight. At such a time, as in this case, a hound has a certain resignation that it is salutary for a man to watch and to imitate; it appears to indicate that the dog realizes that even the best nose must sometimes fail, and that, after all is said and done, there is something in this life which, call it what you will, you might as well admit to be mystery.

Several times I have kept foxes as pets, rearing them from kittens; but I never found that they became wholly tame. They retained a certain vivid, wild mistrust that I tried in vain to eradicate. The feline in the fox's nature prevents it from becoming as trustfully affectionate as a dog or even a raccoon.

I remember one little fellow of which I was very fond. But he never got over wanting to get away. And who can blame him? I had him on a chain with a tiny collar; but his favourite manœuvre was rolling over, pawing at the collar, and fighting the chain. When at last I turned him loose (to prey on my chickens and turkeys), he left me without the formalities of a good-bye. But I was repaid by being freed from the wistfulness of his gaze as he used to look with ceaseless and pathetic longing at the deep forest that was his home. A wild thing in captivity in sight of its home is a far more appealing and poignant figure than one which is far away from its true environment.

To be abroad at night in lonely woods is surely to be in the presence of mystery—faintly divulged now and then, but for the most part silent and sealed. I recall a walk I took one night down the majestic avenue of a deserted plantation, with no object in view save to listen and to learn. Starlight shot wan lances down through the hollies and the myrtles. A lost sea wind made the lordly crests of the huge yellow pines murmur and wave. I paused by the massive bole of a mighty oak, and there stood listening. Almost indistinguishable from the rustlings of the wind in the trees there came sounds of wild-life movements—stealthy steps, shadowy subterfuges, now and then a broken twig, now and then a petulant stamp of a foot. The woods were alive with the creatures of the night, the stalked and the pursued, the hunters and the hunted.

Down the avenue I saw a shape coming. Its big fluffy brush told me that it was a fox. It has always seemed to me that the fox travels like the cat rather than like the dog. There's something feline about his brand of craftiness. He usually appears quite intent upon his journey; but now and then he has a way of stopping at a log, his forefeet upon it, eying the country beyond. Indeed, this particular stance is quite typical of the fox. Yet practically all wild things are likely to pause at an obstruction, however slight, if they are not in full flight. I have often noticed deer stop before stepping over a log; a raccoon will do the same thing; a wild turkey is given to such a pause; and I have even known a huge

diamond-back rattlesnake idle away about ten minutes before he could make up his mind to thrust his massive head into the vast unknown beyond a fallen pine. These pauses are, naturally, for the purpose of reconnoitring; and as a reconnoitrer, the fox is an expert.

This fox coming down the moonlit avenue did not see me though he passed within twenty feet. I watched him disappear down the shadowy vista of the oaks. A few moments later came his raucous bark—sardonic, canine, mordant. Anyone hearing a fox bark will know at once that the voice is that of a wild thing. There is that about it which will immediately distinguish it from the bark of the dog. This fox was answered, afar off, by an acquaintance. They then proceeded to have a conversation, a long-distance dialogue that was tinged with emotion.

“Rau-rau-raa-raa!” says the first fox, in approved collegiate style.

From the lonely edges of a negro graveyard comes the answering cry:

“Rack-rack-rau-rau!”

All these “a’s” are very broad and deep-throated; and the cries themselves are given with studied deliberateness.

“Yei-raa-raa!” calls the first—the shrill initial cry having a joyous abandon about it, as if crying, “With you, old scout!”

“Rau-rau-rau-rau-rau!” barks his fellow, with understanding and reassurance.

This kind of dialogue, especially on a moonlit night

of spring, may be continued almost indefinitely. Many a time at home on the plantation I have gone to sleep dubiously lulled by this unearthly chorus from the woodlands. My own belief is that moonlight has as powerful an emotional effect upon a fox as upon a dog. I have not observed that foxes bark more in the mating season than at other times, Nature providing for subtler methods of communication between the sexes. There usually seems to be about the barking of a fox a certain challenge. But in justice let it be said that in an actual fight, a fox can often stand his own against the best of dogs. He has a catlike agility and a certain wild swiftness that make him formidable against a single antagonist. Against a pack, of course, he is helpless—as would anything else be.

Not long ago I was walking down a pine-trashed road with a negro trapper who is an expert woodsman; his name, Gabriel, should have a special significance in the fur-bearing world, for many are the wild-cat, the otter, the mink, and the raccoon that, as a trapper, he has summoned to final judgment. But his luck with foxes has been small, indeed, for a man of his prowess, ignominious. I asked him why it was so.

"Come," he said, as laconically as an Iroquois chieftain, "and I will show you."

We left the old road and turned into a narrow pathway. A few yards down this we came to a halt before a bare space of white sand in the pathway itself. There was a strange little shallow pit there, and

buried therein, yet in plain view, were three steel traps. Near them I saw a few tiny feathers, a black, hard substance, and fragments of fur. In the soft sands were fresh fox tracks.

"I set here two days ago," Gabriel told me. "I had one trap baited with a sparrow, one with a mouse, and one with a burned sweet potato—which is the best fox-bait of all. Every trap was covered with sand and pine straw. You see how they are now. That fox uncovered every one; he stole every bait; and he went on his way without springing a trap. Now you see why I find a fox hard to catch."

To me the fox embodies, represents, all that is wildest in the wilderness, all that the deep swamp suggests of mystery, all that the shimmering, enigmatic wild wood means of sorcery and of wonder.

If darkness, and the streaming splendour of the stars, and the haunting silences of the "huge and thoughtful night" have a secret, it seems to me to be divulged in this most appealing, most silent, most beautiful and graceful of wild creatures.

VI

RECONNOITRING

THIS particular patch of sweet-bays and myrtles was not more than a half acre in extent, the bushes in it were rather low, and it lay in the open flat pinewoods, at some distance from any heavy thicket. Such a bit of cover usually looks tempting to a buck. Especially toward the close of the hunting season, when he is wariest, he does not care about lying in a densely thick place. He may be well concealed in such cover, but from it he cannot conveniently reconnoitre; and the business of reconnoitring is the white-tail's life insurance.

I must have walked, I am sure, within ten feet of this buck, which was lying couched under a fragrant canopy of sweet-bay. I did not see him. He, of course, had seen me from afar. He did not jump when I was nearest him because, all things considered, he concluded that it was wiser for him to skulk. But when I had passed him some thirty yards he nearly scared me to death by tearing open the bays in a wild rush for liberty. The only difference between a buck doing that kind of thing and a torpedo in full flight is that one has a white tail and the other has a white head. I brought this buck down. He fell just on the edge of the

patch of bays, not more than about twenty-five yards from where I had jumped him.

Two hunting comrades with me, seeing the whole performance, came crashing through the little thicket, shouting, calling to each other and to me, and otherwise making much racket. We gathered about the fallen stag, admiring him, for he was a big one, and in his prime. As a chilly rain was falling, we made up a little fire of pine knots. Then, with considerable talking and much struggle, we managed to hang up the buck. We then decided to resume our hunt. We had not taken five steps back toward the tiny thicket before I heard the bays part quietly, and I caught a glimpse of a second buck sneaking out of the cover! He was larger than the first. Instead of leaping over the bushes, as his fellow had done, he was stealing out, half crouched, under them. The old reconnoitrer had outmanœuvred us.

Despite the break made by his comrade buck with whom he had been lying, despite the sound of the gun, the shouts of the hunters, the breaking of the men through the brush quite near him, our talking the whole business over by a fire within easy gunshot of where he lay, this ancient tactician of the wilds had decided that, all things considered, it might be wiser for him to stay where he was. However, when we moved back his way he stole out ahead of us. And his strategy saved him.

This little incident illustrates a principle followed by the wildest of our animals, and to some degree by all living creatures. They make constant use of the

fine art of reconnoitring. And, if I may judge by the observations of many years, deer do a lot of their reconnoitring while they are lying down. Only a few weeks ago I noticed this thing happen.

I was on a deer stand in comparatively open woods, the wind blowing from the drive to me; and I had tiptoed to this stand with especial care, so as not to let my presence be known by any deer that might be lying on the fringes of the drive. While waiting I heard a negro cutting wood behind me in the pine forest, perhaps three hundred yards away. In due time the drivers came toward me, and when two hundred yards directly in front of me they started a stag that looked as big as a respectable ox. He had huge horns—a twelve-pointer, I judged—and he was headed straight for me. I was so well hidden that he could not possibly have seen or winded me. Yet he took only about three or four leaps in my direction. Then he halted; a moment later he dashed back through the drivers and made a clean getaway. Later, as I thought over this escape of the crafty buck, I made up my mind that he had long been listening to the sound of the woodsman's axe beyond me, and even before being startled had done enough mental reconnoitring to decide that when he left his bed he wouldn't head toward the place where the chopper was working. It is often on so slight an incident as this that the life of a wild creature depends; and he makes it his business to pause, to consider, to weigh chances, to look the landscape over. To a wild thing "Look before you leap" isn't a gentle piece of advice;

it's a stern law. Indeed, it may with truth be said that most wild creatures reconnoitre their way through this world.

It is sport to watch a fox expend the riches of his craftiness upon the matter of pauses. Scores of times I have watched foxes in the wilds, either when they were just normally moving about or when they were being pursued. A fox acts as if one enemy were just behind him and another right in front of him, and several on each side. If he comes to a slight obstruction, such as a fallen log, he will set his forefeet upon it, pause, and, enjoying the advantage of a slight elevation, will scrutinize the surrounding woods. A wild thing generally pauses at an obstacle, at a road, at a pathway, at a turn. Both a deer and a fox will usually pause at a fence, less to get a stance for jumping than just to look about. Angels are by no means (though I claim a rather desultory acquaintance with them) the only ones to fear to tread where fools rush in.

While a fox is half afraid of crossing a road, he loves to travel one, the reason being, of course, the promised security of the open stretch before him, not to mention the matter of easier going. A fox is exceedingly partial to a path also, and the fact that he shares its use with human beings appears not to disturb him in the least.

Deer have a small manœuvre all their own upon coming to a road; this same performance I have seen, not once, but many times. It must be considered by

them a kind of a fool's mate for a hunter, a standard trick move. To make the business concrete, I may say that early one morning I was in an old road bordered by dense thickets of young yellow pines. A hunting comrade was a half mile to my left. I was loitering a little at this spot, for I knew it to be a favourite place for deer to cross. Suddenly I heard the unmistakable sound of deer running. My friend must have started them. Concealing myself quickly, I waited. The pines were dewy. A warm, damp breeze was stirring. I knew my scent would carry far. On came the deer. Within twenty yards of the road they stopped. For two full minutes they thus stood. Then they separated—parted company to cross the road—"split for the road," as some old hunters say. Almost at whirlwind speed they crossed the road, and almost a hundred yards apart. I got one of them; at least I shot him as he leaped the road, and followed his track, to find him three hundred yards farther on. But before I found him I discovered that the two bucks had come together again. And that is what they generally do after parting company to cross a road. One must say to the other, "Do as you please, old man, but I'm going this way." Yet they have an agreement to meet a few hundred yards across the road. A doe and a buck will sometimes have this kind of arrangement, but two old stags generally act better thus in concert. Repeatedly I have seen the same manœuvre executed, always with the utmost felicity of precision. It is not the "magic hand of

chance" that directs such stratagems. It is high intelligence, trained to act swiftly and deftly in moments of peril.

It appears to me that if any D.S.O. decorations are to be given for reconnoitring, the wild turkey will get his. His whole existence is one long reconnoitre, just a continuous scouting party. Outrageous fortune has dowered him richly; his size, his splendour, and the ravishing flavour of his flesh have made man covet him with a mighty longing. He therefore, though he carries no big stick, walks very softly. The chances that he will see you before you will see him are about 1,000 to 1. And his hearing is probably keener than his sight.

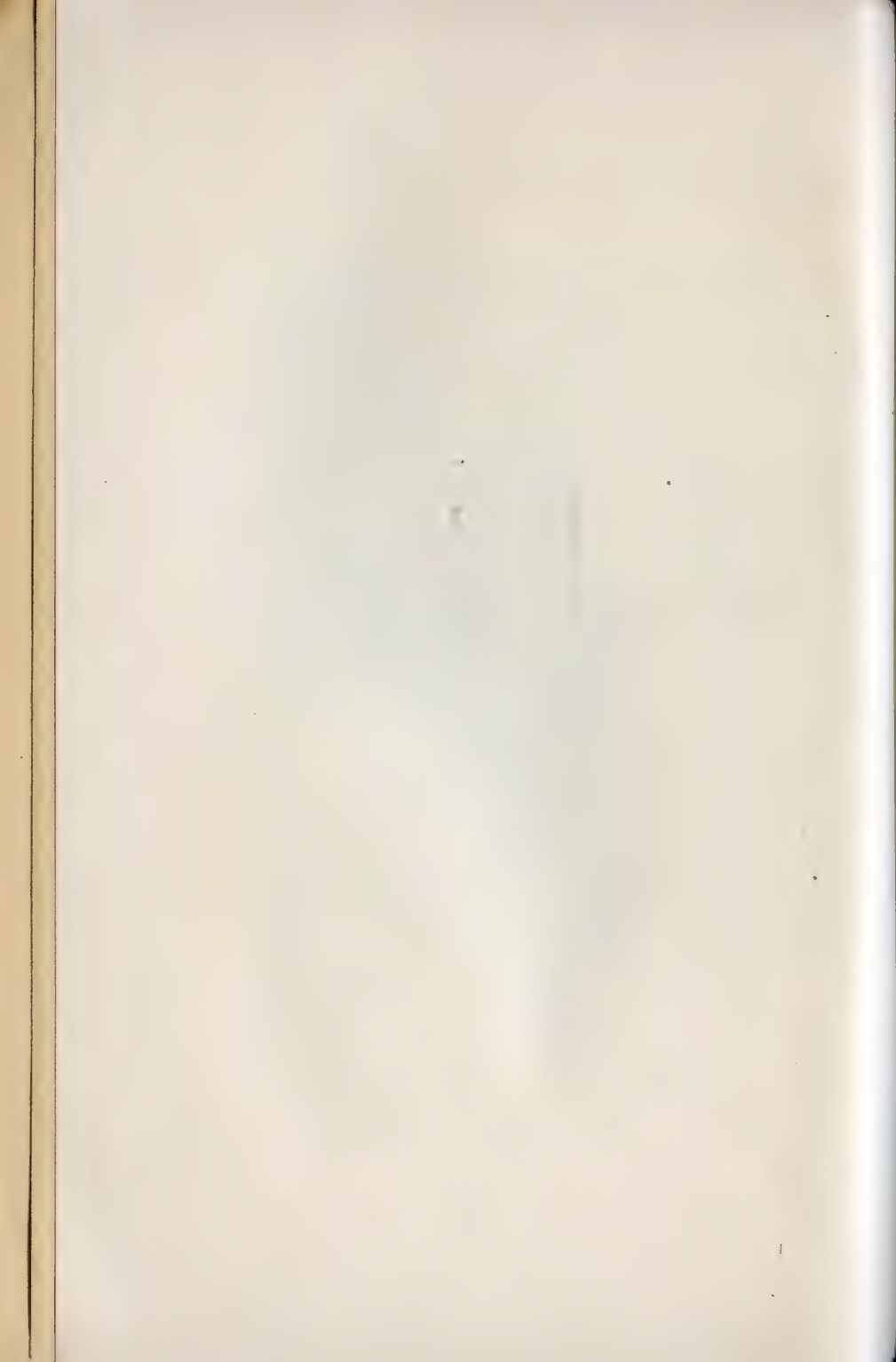
I remember being in the wild woods one day near the head of a big lake. As there were much pine-mast about, and scarlet swamp-brier berries, and the sweet seeds of the lotus on the shores of the lagoon, and as the place held much virgin timber, I was on the lookout for turkeys; it goes without saying that the turkeys were on the lookout for me and for the likes of me. A flock came within a hundred yards without my suspecting their presence. Then I saw a snakelike head lift itself out of a patch of gallberries. The head and neck were as stiff as a rod; they glittered in the sunlight. Those marvellous eyes had detected a slight movement that I had made. The gleaming head was withdrawn beneath the bushes, a few moments later it reappeared nearer the edge of the copse. He was periscoping me. Of course, I tried to pretend that I



Photo by W. L. Wright

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WILD TURKEYS FEEDING IN WINTER



wasn't there at all. But the eyes of a wild turkey are subject to few optical illusions. One long, glittering gaze the old bird gave me, then he dodged under cover, and when next I saw him he was leading the whole flock at a handsome trot directly away from me across the open woods. I saw those birds no more.

On another occasion, early one warm November day, I was on the side of a big wooded gully in the mountains of southern Pennsylvania. It was good turkey country. The original timber had been cut away some thirty-five years before, and the second growth had attained fine size. Many of the ancient trees that the lumberman had rejected offered ideal sites for turkeys to roost. Wild grapes were plentiful that year; there were some chestnuts; and the bottoms of all the gullies had growths of greenbrier, tea-berries, and the like, bearing food in which turkeys delight. I was lying on the ground in the sunshine, basking in the warmth of it and marvelling at the lingering beauty of the tattered woodland. The world was so still that I could hear the fall of a damp leaf on the far side of the gully. Stalking game is not always strenuous work; there's the kind of stalking here described: to loaf at ease and "invite your soul," and at the same time to feel that very likely you are doing the very best thing to afford you the sight of a bearded gobbler. The real way to stalk a wild turkey is to let him stalk you.

After a half hour or so I heard a step just over the brow of the ridge beyond the gully. It might be a man I knew, it might be a gray squirrel (yet the squir-

rel can soon be distinguished by the jumps he makes in the leaves), it might be a ruffed grouse, or it might be the visitor I was prepared to welcome. In a few moments I saw the sun suddenly catch a shimmering object on the crest of the ridge. It was a wild turkey. He was coming over the top, headed straight for me. In the full sunlight, on a hillside comparatively bare, he would make his approach. It was an unusual opportunity to discover just how a wild turkey when alone behaves when he is without special apprehension.

The great bird's extraordinary deliberateness was incredible. He appeared as much at his ease as a wild turkey is capable of becoming. I noticed that his feathers were all fluffed out and his wings and tail were much relaxed. He came down the slope at an angle, so that he had visibly to foreshorten the leg that was uphill. The downhill leg was lifted and placed with considerable gingerly care, as if he did not want to dislodge anything. Once or twice I saw him try one footing, withdraw his leg, and then set his Number 10 on a firmer place. All this was so much like the behaviour of a somewhat timid human walker on a slope that it was very appealing and interesting. At the same time I had a large silver watch in my pocket that emitted a most stentorian tick. I timed the turkey's walking by the ticks of the watch. The slope was approximately seventy yards long, and, since he undertook it at an angle, he covered probably eighty-five yards. As nearly as I could tell, it took him seven minutes. At that rate, he would take

eleven hours to go a mile. But it is not always that a turkey puts on four-wheel brakes. I think he can do a mile in three minutes, running, and in little more than a minute when flying.

I have mentioned roads and logs as barriers of a certain undesigned but warning kind that wild creatures do not like to cross without due reconnoitring. For wild fowl and such creatures as alligators bends in creeks and other watercourses are always possible places of surprise danger. They therefore must be manœuvred with deft skill. I remember one day watching an old mallard drake, evidently a bit over-anxious, approach a marshy point in a river.

I was in a blind, and he had no notion that I was near. He was all alone, and apparently was tired of solitude. He swam rather briskly up to the marsh edge, but as he got to the lee of the tiny peninsula he became dubious. He didn't know what might be behind that whispering fringe of marsh. With infinite caution he swam along the edge of the point, slowing his pace as he came to the nose of it, when he seemed to drift idly. I could see that he was peeping through the thinning fringe of the marsh. He was reconnoitring, and he was executing the business with a thrilling precision that I had to admire.

On another occasion, going down a straight stretch of the river, drifting rather idly in a canoe, I saw a pair of black ducks swim into the tide-flooded marsh and then back into the river at least twenty times, their purpose manifestly being to make sure that I

was not getting too close to them. They would paddle into the sunny warm marsh, pick up, no doubt, a little feed, and then come swimming out to give me the once-over; while doing so they would breast the current and stare at me with a look that was nothing if it was not appraising. Satisfied with my harmlessness, they would again vanish into the marsh, only to reappear a few yards farther down. As long as I maintained a distance of about a hundred and twenty yards from them they were content, but when I saw fit to shorten it to a hundred they bade me farewell. A duck knows a good deal about gun ranges and the like.

On another day I was following a very different kind of game, the same being a twelve-foot bull alligator. While paddling up the dark and narrow channel of a long lagoon, I had surprised him sleeping on a floating island. Slithering off, he decided to swim the channel ahead of me. I paddled manfully after him, barely able to hold my own. After a quarter of a mile of this, he came to a sharp bend. Some sort of curious danger he knew was after him, and the trick of it all might be right here at this turn. He slowed his pace; he stopped; silently he went down, leaving on the lagoon's ebony waters his shape perfectly outlined in ivory-white tiny bubbles.

The alligator, like many another marauder, does most of his reconnoitring for a sinister purpose. Because he is amphibious, he is a double menace. It is nothing for him, after a brief bit of cold-eyed

periscoping, to approach a hog rooting on a reedy margin. Not even a razorback schooled in the bitter lessons of experience appears capable of detecting submarine attacks. Some wild creatures reconnoitre that they may live; others, that they may kill their prey.

Of deft reconnoitrers, I believe that the Wilson snipe should hold an honoured place, for much of his strategy is, like that of the ruffed grouse, executed on the wing. It is not by mere chance that he zigzags hurtlingly away from the hunter. He knows what he is about. His main purpose seems to be to dodge; but it may be that he acquires by his peculiar darting flight a more sudden momentum, just as a skater does by executing somewhat the same kind of manœuvre. Practically all birds when shot at and missed will execute strategy, but only a few of the wiser ones will dodge before the gun is fired. That the snipe's manner of escape is effective may be illustrated.

One day at a big hunting club I was talking with the manager, who had invited me down for some shooting. The weather was warm; the ducks were shy, quail were scarce, the deer had retired into the deep swamp. Conditions of this sort had prevailed for a week, he told me, but he thought that he and I might manage to stir out something. Meanwhile, about ten club members, most of them near-by sportsmen, were lolling on the club porch.

"I'm going to put just one restriction on your shooting," the manager told me with a smile. "Down in the rice field yonder there's one old Wilson snipe.

For heaven's sake, don't kill him. He's furnished shooting for this whole crowd of men for the past week, and I think he's good for another."

But it is not to be supposed that only the lordlier creatures of the wild practise skilful reconnoitring. A rattlesnake, I think, is as careful a mover as either a deer or a turkey; indeed, lacking the major resource of speedy flight, he invariably exercises what may at first sight seem like prodigious care. An anecdote will illustrate what I mean.

As I sat one day on some old slabs of pine near the site of an abandoned sawmill, my attention was attracted to a curious whispering sound in a bushy watercourse close by. The woods were still; the world seemed taking a siesta. The penetrant, insistent sound continued. It had something rasping and scaly about it. Of course it was a snake.

The rattler—for such it was—insinuated himself with the utmost care through the thicket; but he was coming out on the little slope on which I was sitting. I saw him before he left the copse, his colour striking me as rather gaudy. He was in the yellow phase, having just shed his old skin. For slowness of progress this rattler would make a turtle look cheap. Sometimes a turtle can paddle along at a pretty sprightly gait. But this old rattler had about his approach something infinitely crafty; he had the calculated deliberation of ancient guile. This regal serpent's course, as all accurate observers know, is straight; he can be identified by the track he leaves. His ribs are movable

and prehensile, and under his heavy hide the rondure of their bending gives the proper purchase for propulsion. I think, indeed, that the exceptional nature of a rattler's way of locomotion prevents his going fast; he simply cannot flash away in a wild wriggle, as can the black-snake. His engine is a one-cylinder; hence he has to watch the road with particular care.

This particular snake came, after many hesitations, clear of the gallberries and huckleberries under the shade of which he had been sequestered. He advanced toward an old sodden pine log that barred his pathway. Reaching this, he stopped. He lay so very still that I had begun to think that he was drowsing or that something had alarmed him; but then, a fraction of an inch at a time, his broad malignant head sidled over the log. It was not lifted clear of the log, but was thrust forward, clinging to the mossy bark. His head on the log, he lay still again, his gaze glittering. Rossetti described that kind of look when he wrote, "Sleepless, with cold, commemorative eyes." For a minute or two he relapsed thus on the log, reconnoitring; then he came forward slowly, his huge bulk rasping over the fallen tree. From the copse to the log was perhaps ten feet. To come from the copse to my side of the log that rattler did not take less than fifteen minutes. At such a rate, a rattler would take some five and a half days to go a mile. However, rattlers do much travelling at night, and I believe that in the darkness they travel faster than when in the broad glare of day they are exposed to the deadly attacks of many enemies. I believe the

rattlesnake travels fastest in water. He is really an expert swimmer, and his speed in that element is altogether respectable.

Lately I was afforded a good example of the reconnoitring tactics of wild game. When the snow was very deep, I fed a covey of fourteen quail in a pine thicket by my house. I had the snow shovelled away from beneath a bushy pine and a shelter built on the north and west. Feed was scattered on the pine straw exposed when the snow was removed. The birds soon found this refuge, with its banquet spread. I watched them at close range coming across the snow toward the shelter. From beneath the low-sweeping dense branches of pine they would step warily, turning their heads to cast looks upward for a hawk. From pine to pine they would scurry over the snow, often chattering in excited timidity. Even when feeding they were constantly alert—almost glitteringly restless, beautiful, imminent. A quail a season old knows that a wild creature has no inalienable rights. At least, if he would for a moment enjoy life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness his existence must be a continual vigil. He must watch while he is still, and before he moves he must do some able reconnoitring.

VII

THE ANTEDILUVIAN DELTA

THAT sink of iniquitous mud known as the Causeway—a perfect trap one mile long spanning the Delta of the Santee—was my waiting place on a certain rainy Sunday. Expecting guests, I had written them that I should meet them on the Causeway. My selection of this particular rendezvous had a delicate subtlety that I had been careful not to explain. As a matter of fact, deep in my heart was a conviction that if my guests were not met on their attempted passage of the Delta, they assuredly would turn back. If mud only had a market value, and the watery pits in roads were saleable, all people living in the Low Country of South Carolina would soon win their economic independence.

While waiting in the sleety drizzle for my friends, I built a fire against the base of a huge cypress that had a cavernous hollow at the bottom. So long had this old monarch been standing that I do not doubt that it had witnessed the fierce partisan warfare that Marion, the Swamp Fox, had waged against the relentless Tarleton; for this region was the scene of many an encounter between those two famous commanders, and in the gloomy fastness of the swamps of

the Delta, Marion often reassembled his men after one of his scattering and fiery attacks upon the Red-coats.

The leaves and twigs in the sheltered bottom of the cypress cavity were dry, and the cheerful ruby and emerald flames were soon dancing in brilliance. Knowing well the nature of the fourteen-mile drive that my friends had to take before reaching the Causeway, and aware also that a road-worker in that part of the country is as rare as a real live angel, I was prepared to wait a half day or more. Yet I was content, at ease with that peculiar security which one feels when he is in a region familiar to him since boyhood. Though only three miles from home, I was in the very heart of one of the most genuinely primeval regions of North America.

My fire was grateful; and it was ambitious—as most fires are. I didn't want it to burn down the rugged old giant of a tree; but such appeared to be the intent of its urgent flames. They lapped the semi-decayed wood with their jewel-coloured tiny tongues; they crackled in secret merriment. I threw a few handfuls of sand on the blaze to curb its lavishness. Smoke poured up the hollow. I looked up to see if sparks were flying out of the top of this natural chimney. A hollow of considerable size was visible some fifty feet up—beyond which the stately tree-crest towered—or, as Shelley might put it, was “pinnacled in the intense inane.” My eye caught sight of certain gray drifting wraiths of smoke; then they discerned something far more tangible. The smoke

had disturbed a dweller in the ancient hollow, and he was crawling out for fresh air. It was a big male raccoon; and even at the distance that he was from me I could see upon his face his almost human look of patient tolerance, of staid wisdom, of calm acceptance of the changes and chances of this odd experience known as Life. He looked infinitely bored by this rude disturbance of his innocent siesta; but he crawled out on a stout limb with a deft precision that showed that he was fully alert to the peril of the situation. I do not know exactly how to rank wild creatures in social castes, but assuredly the raccoon manifests, even in the face of deadliest danger, a sinuous readiness, a dauntlessness so quiet, so elegant, so oriental in its grace and its intelligence that he should be ranked with the First Families. I do not know an animal that has mastered with greater felicity the difficult art of living.

To see the raccoon climb out of the hollow did not surprise me; for on the Delta this amiable philosopher is very abundant. But I was not prepared for what I next observed: out of the dark aperture there now emerged, with curious little hoppy jerks, an aged gray squirrel—so old and large and weather-beaten as to appear dusky and burly. I do not think that he had denned with the raccoon; the vast hollow probably had inviting ramifications into the massive limbs which could accommodate several wild families of quite different nature. The drowsy squirrel, with a peculiar artful sloth, shunted himself warily upward on the tree's bole, where he hung craftily.

After him came another—a sleek soft gray female, its fur fluffy and dry. . . . I have observed that even on the wettest day, when wild things are abroad, they manage to keep dry. A deer starts out of a drenched thicket with look as spick-and-span as if he has been lying in sunshine; fox squirrels playing about on the ground in the rain always by their beautiful dryness belie their dripping surroundings. . . . Following the first squirrel out of the hollow came two others, “to the amazement of mine eyes which did behold them.” The permeating and persuasive smoke had driven from that single hollow a raccoon and four gray squirrels. And, even as I watched the assembling wild company, higher up, from a smaller hole above the big one, a barred owl, blinking portentous eyes, floated off through the misty air on wings “soft as a lady’s sigh.”

By now I had forgotten all about the cold rain and the prospects of a long wait on the lonely Causeway. Indeed, my chief concern became the fear that my friends might arrive before I had had further opportunity to observe some of the abundant wild life about. Remarkable as it may seem, almost any of the great den trees of the dim inviolate Delta swamp might yield a like number of wild inhabitants; in the matter of accommodating the wild folk of that strange and fascinating region the tree in which I had kindled my fire could hardly be called exceptional.

Of course, when a wildcat makes his abode in some tolerant patriarch cypress or water-oak or tupelo, he is likely to have the whole tree to himself. What the

tiger is to the jungles of India, the stealthy and powerful wildcat is to the wildwoods of the South. There is no creature more feared by his brethren of the wild. Nor, when wounded and cornered, is he a mean antagonist for a man. I know of one which weighed more than fifty pounds; and I have shot one that weighed forty-four. Such weight, compact of fierce energy, supple sinew, mighty muscles, and feline craft, represents a type of ferocity that is not appreciated unless encountered. I do not mean that the wildcat will attack man; but in the event of a combat, my stakes would be laid on the cat. I have known two men to be sprung upon by wildcats, but in each case the cat probably misapprehended the identity of his intended victim. In one case the man was crouched in a thick clump of myrtle bushes calling a wild turkey. Doubtless the wildcat that sprang on him mistook him for the bird that he always covets mightily. When the victim of this so-called "attack" recounted his singular adventure to me, my estimate of him as a caller of turkeys rose considerably. It takes an artist, I think, to deceive a wildcat; for the bay lynx is himself of deception a master mind.

The Santee, which makes the Delta what it is, comes a long way. The Saluda and the Broad rivers, uniting at Columbia, form the Congaree; this in turn is joined below South Carolina's capital by the Wateree. The confluence of these two considerable rivers forms the Santee, which flows southeastward to the coast. As it enters the great coastal plain it

begins to penetrate lonely, almost inviolate, swamps. Indeed, were an explorer set down unaware on the jungle-grown banks of the mighty Santee in the melancholy Santee Swamp, he might easily believe that he was on the Paraná, the Lualaba, or on some mysterious and dusky tributary of the Congo or the Zambesi.

Fourteen miles from the ocean the Santee forks—the North Santee and the South Santee flowing almost parallel to the coast. At no point is the distance between them much more than a mile; yet often the tortuous reed-hung waterways connecting the rivers wind for six miles or more through the strange swamps, the exotic thickety fields, the marshy lush expanses. Everything about the Delta has a certain languor, a certain lethal ease, a lustral, basking indolence, which is suggestive of the vast uncounted leisure ages of the gods. And I have sensed about this weird and lonely region a certain appealing melancholy, a perpetual spiritual autumn that haunts the imagination; yet the pathos is always relieved by Nature's inimitable charming naïveté: overhead will be streamers of funereal moss; yet over the same tree that hangs out those gray banners will climb flauntingly the yellow jasmine, to ring her golden bells.

In this fourteen-mile stretch of wasteland wild life is singularly abundant; and it appears in some of those forms which have a romantic appeal. Perhaps raccoons and squirrels are too common to merit such a classification; but my next friends deserve all that can be said in their commendation.

My fire had become so unruly that I had extinguished it by heaping sand upon it. I then took a little walk down the Causeway, stepping with natural gaucherie from the end of one puncheon-log to that of another. Nearly all of these logs, the "corduroy" supposed to give the road a sound bottom, had been smashed by the timber wagons that had passed over them, and their frayed ends stuck up crazily on either side of the abysmal black ruts. I have heard of wagons in the Argentine that have wheels eight feet high to enable them to touch the bottoms of the roads' century-old ruts and at the same time to keep their axles clear of the road-bed. In the Carolina Low Country such vehicles would be very pertinent.

A chill misty rain was falling as I warily made my way down the lonely tree-arched roadway. On one side was an old canal that had not been used for sixty years. Out of it grew black gums, tupelos, and hollies of great size. On the Delta I have seen a holly tree more than fifty feet high; and the largest red cedars of which I have any knowledge grow there. The banks of the canal were densely fringed with dewberry vines, tall blackberry bushes, and with shimmering stretches of green-and-yellow canebrakes, that seem never to have done with their sibilant whispering converse. Such places harbour innumerable swamp rabbits; and, when the weather is warm, for every rabbit, at least half-a-dozen cottonmouth moccasins. No snakes were now abroad, though as this region is directly on the Line of Hibernation, where the brumal sleep of certain wild creatures, especially of rep-

tiles, is entirely a matter of the state of the weather, to see them would not have surprised me. Alligators of the Santee country are supposed to hibernate; and they do take naps. But their slumbers are desultory; and I have heard an old bull bellowing his spring song of love early in February. While hunting in January I have found the formidable diamond-back rattler sunning himself before his gloomy den.

The wistful landscape before me was a delicate merging of jasmine vines festooning roadside bushes, soft rain like a tender veil, glistening foliage—silence and intense woodland privacy save for the intimate gossip of the gentle but insistent shower. Suddenly ahead of me on the Causeway I discerned certain forms—shapes that a true American should be willing to go a long way to see, for they are among our aborigines. A flock of wild turkeys was coming toward me. So light of foot are these great birds, and so deft at stepping and at the avoidance of pitfalls that a typical swamp road of the South is a masterpiece for the accommodation of such wary walkers. Unaware of my presence, the turkeys approached somewhat disconsolately through the misty rain. Motionless beside a tree I awaited their coming. . . . All my life I have noticed that on a rainy day a turkey loves a road. Indeed, so well established is the wild turkey's practice of following a road in a rain that I have frequently come upon a flock at such a time by doing what I was sure the birds were doing—following some old woodland trail. Turkeys hate to get wet and be-draggled by dripping bushes; and the insistent noise

of the rain makes the approach of an enemy possible through brush; consequently in bad weather they will either keep moving in a pathway or else will stand quietly in some sheltered place. I have known them to resort during a rainy spell to the leeward side of a tall river bluff, and also, in the mountains, to rock overhangs, such as the Indians also used.

These wild birds now on the alleged Causeway had probably been bred on the mainland across one of the rivers; but upon the opening of the hunting season they had repaired to the Delta, to stay there in security until the mating season should return, and the gun of the hunter be no longer heard in the land. Nor could a more perfect range for these splendid birds be found. They have original-growth timber in which to roost; ridge after timbered ridge upon which to wander and to feed; lone fields of marsh in which to forage for luscious seeds of such aquatic plants as the lotus; and, best of all, comparative freedom from all forms of molestation. If an occasional sportsman visits their sanctuary, counting himself fortunate if he safely regains the mainland, he is not likely to come again. A more difficult country to traverse than the Delta is not known to me. But what is poor going for a man may be a boulevard for wild game.

On came my beautiful flock—twenty-six of them, carefully counted. It has been my observation that no wild creature can change its appearance more suddenly and more completely than a wild turkey. At one moment he will be fluffed out in plumage,

lazy in appearance, nonchalant, off guard, strangely barnyardish; the next moment he will be transformed, translated. Alarmed, even in the slightest degree, he will instantly become trim, watchful, gleaming with wild elegance and imminent alertness—a tall, slim, swift creature, matchless in wariness. These big birds now coming toward me were for the most part in the relaxed state; but one or two, like sentries, were on guard. They were now within thirty feet, trooping along amiably, picking up acorns or other food, now and then calling with a soft plaintive note. I watched an old hen craftily turning over bits of bark to discover what insects had found refuge thereunder. The wild turkey's body is not particularly well balanced on its legs; when the bird is heavy, the body rocks and sways when the turkey is walking, and when the bird breaks into a run, this movement becomes exaggerated. Indeed, the bosom seems almost pendulous; and its swaying effects in a marked degree the manner in which the turkey swings its legs in running. Instead of a straight-leg trot, the turkey is inclined to swing his legs outward into rather awkward and absurd arcs. But he covers the ground. On a good many occasions I have tried to run down in the open woods birds with broken wings. My score of catches is by no means a perfect one.

In this flock there were more gobblers than hens. One gobbler, the apparent king of the gathering, was a stately wild thing, weighing, I judged, more than twenty pounds; a gleam in the rain was his iridescent plumage. Broad of back was he, profound in depth of

body, regal in carriage—the hero, I might well surmise, of many a battle with others of his kind, the winner by strategy of many an encounter with his arch-enemy, man. I noticed carefully that he had three distinct beards, one under the other, the topmost being the shortest. I know not whether the number of beards confers superiority; but certainly this majestic bird's ensemble was such that he had no need of special symbols to indicate his power. I noticed that his heavy red legs were decorated with felonious spurs; and that his huge feet sank in the mud under his ponderous weight.

The turkeys came within fifteen feet of me without apparently suspecting my presence; as a matter of fact, if an observer does not move, any wild thing, however keen its senses may be, if it does not wind him, may fail to see him. The power of vision enabling one living thing to identify another is an exceedingly superior gift; not many men have it. It is an entirely different affair to detect movement, and, with the attention so attracted, to identify. Swift to see motion, wild things (and man as well) may be said to be far less apt at discerning and identifying. I have had deer almost brush past me, when the wind was blowing from them to me, without their apparently noticing me.

Full into the pathway of the wild flock I now stepped. The effect was curious and instantaneous, and not nearly so electrifying as one might suppose a human being's projecting himself thus into the midst of a group of the wildest birds might be. It has always

seemed to me that the most intelligent wild things seldom flee incontinently. They may hesitate a second for swift calculation, for imminent decision. They escape because they know how. They preserve their lives through the exercise of a virtue that we are inclined to imagine is preëmpted by man—presence of mind.

On sight of me, about half the birds rose on gleaming wet wings and merely dropped over the old canal into the gloomy woodland beyond. Some of the others crouched and ran into the underbrush fringing the Causeway. Several ran past me down the road, while the remainder dashed back the way they had come. So varying were the avenues of escape selected that I could not help admiring the individualism of the performance. Wild creatures of superior intelligence never act *en masse* at times of crisis. For example, it is customary for a stag to precede a doe under all ordinary circumstances; but I have noticed that if the buck is being hunted, he will frequently send the doe out ahead of him, or a younger buck—"to take the shot," as old hunters say—or at least to receive whatever surprise is in keeping for the escapers.

A few minutes after the flock had been scattered I heard the old mother from the borders of the mouldering swamp begin calling in a sweet alto. She got plenty of answers; and distinctly I could hear above the drip of the rain certain telltale splashings as the gathering birds ran toward the old bird's summons.

Gathered again, and at ease once more, these

turkeys could range northward for seven miles through lonely wood and solitary marsh, by languorous estuary and lost lagoon; southward they might pass for seven lonelier miles until they came to Cedar Island, the wooded tip of the Delta. Not in either passage would they encounter human habitation, and the only human being they might meet would be a man like me, a waiter in the rain on the forsaken Causeway, or perhaps a prowling negro hunter searching the ridges of this wilderness for his supply of Christmas bacon.

VIII

FIRST AID

THE signal for the attack has come. The men adjust their light equipment. Swiftly they climb out of the trenches. They advance. In a half hour the thing is over, and into the dressing stations in the rear the wounded are borne. Ambulances, doctors, nurses, orderlies—all these are in attendance. Life that was risked so lightly is now guarded with the utmost zeal. The wounded man, if he is fortunate, has every aid that medical science can render.

It is not so with our brothers of the wild. Let us say that the hunt has begun. The stag is up. In his superb race down a wooded ridge a soft-nosed bullet rips along his flank and shoulder. He knows that if he falls he is doomed. He races on. In the kind of war that he is in, if he is down he is out. On he goes, over the ridge, down a long, rocky glen, into a tamarack thicket, through it, and into a cedar swamp. What then?

If the wound is not in his vitals, taking very good care of himself, he probably will recover. He will walk little, he will drink much, he will browse for a while each night. His superb physical vigour will

enable him to sustain the shock even from a terrible wound. He will be twice as alert as usual, for he knows that he is wounded, and therefore legitimate prey for the cougar and for wolves. In deer country it is said that almost every mature stag carries wounds. I have taken buckshot from almost every part of the bodies of deer—from the neck, the shoulder, the flank, the haunch, the legs, the thorax. I believe that more deer carry buckshot than carry rifle bullets. The message spoken by a high-power rifle usually has about it a final tone. I believe, however, that in most cases the deer that hunters grieve over as having "gone off to die" have an even chance to get well. A hunter takes to himself a certain sort of negative comfort and credit in believing and in asserting that the deer he wounded is sure to perish.

Gabriel, the negro trapper, and I were out on a little hunt by the banks of the wide and lonely Santee. Any man who has seen that country will tell you that there's not a more lonesome-looking place in the world. But its wild life redeems it. There is nearly always something in sight to thrill the observer. I like to go with Gabe when he is tending his traps, for he has associated with wild things so long that he seems to understand their psychology. He's only the humblest of plantation negroes, yet for wood lore I hardly know his equal. But neither he nor I expected the thing which now happened.

Where Bowman's Run, after long miles of lazy purling through the pinelands, comes within sight of

the river, it broadens, deepens, and is hushed in its flow, shielded by a tall growth of whispering marsh. That is a mysterious place, for there the river silently enters the woods to meet the stream; and there the stream, as an individual, ceases to exist. Cypressess, tressed and spectral, watch the mystic meeting. Ancient oaks gaze upon the tryst. Gabe and I often watch here, too, for it is a great place to see wild-life sights. This particular kind, however, we had never observed before.

Something was caught in the marsh. We heard, as we neared the stream's mouth, what sounded like a hoarse bleating, then a threshing of some heavy body in the reedy water. Silent for a moment, the creature soon began once more the desperate struggle. The time of the year was late May.

"Gabe, have you a 'gator line set here?" I asked. A 'gator, when firmly hooked, will often roll over and over like a tarpon.

The negro assured me that he had no traps of any kind set at that season, adding that he had abandoned setting at the Bowman's Run mouth since he saw the "hant" there.

"'Hant'?" I inquired. "How close were you to it, Gabe?"

"After I done see it is been a hant I ain't been what you say was close at all. My foot done 'most set the wood on fire from runnin'," he chuckled.

"Perhaps this is it down here now," I suggested, eyeing Gabe's reaction to that suggestion.

But he was unperturbed.

"A hant," he said, as one having authority, "don't grunt and splash; he jest floats along, and sometimes he sighs, jest like the sound of a big owl's wings going by you."

"Ah," I agreed; "I'll remember that. The next time I see a shadowy form floating and sighing around my smokehouse I'll not take it for you."

The good negro laughed.

"Since I take that one ham," he confessed, "I ain't never been there no mo'; but maybe my speret done visit there," he added whimsically.

By this time we were close to the water's edge. In a thick clump of marsh the blades were waving violently. Gabe gave a shout. As if by magic, we heard a frantic struggle. Then a beautiful buck showed himself on the farther side of the channel, dragging himself painfully out of the marsh. He was on three legs. I ran up on the slope to get a clear view of him. The right hind leg had been crushed and almost severed above the knee. Only an alligator could have caused such an injury. But, despite his terrible plight, the deer made off in very good style into the fragrant greenery of a sweet-gum thicket.

"A man might die," Gabe told me, "but a deer will get well. Deer can take care of himself mo' better than a man."

The following autumn I had reason to believe that what the negro had said was true. After the leaves were down and the woods therefore comparatively open, I was down near Bowman's again. Two deer were

started. One was a buck, with the whole right hind leg gone, from a point well above the knee. When I jumped them, the doe located me and stole off; but the buck, sensing that I was close, but not knowing exactly where, came very near. I marvelled at his power to handle himself on three legs. His agility, his speed, his alertness—all these seemed to be retained; but much of his normal grace was gone. The stump of his leg, I could see, was completely healed over. Of course, thus maimed, he might the more easily fall a victim to enemies; but he really had cured himself after his dread accident. Not many men, indeed, would have had the utter hardihood to struggle against so grim a monster as a bull alligator, when once that cold saurian had seized them. But the buck had struggled; had fought against fate; had been released when Gabe's shout had made the 'gator relax his hold. And then the deer not only had had the strength to get clear of danger, but he must have known exactly how to take care of himself.

In observing how wild things minister to themselves after injury, two facts impel chief notice: one is the amazing vitality and physical "come-back" of these creatures, due, of course, to their being in constant training; the other is that a wounded wild thing commonly doctors himself. There are, in fact, no physicians, nurses, or other similar aids in attendance. The business is strictly individual and personal. Indeed, that it is may be considered another proof of a wild thing's intense independence.

I remember a fawn that I "gentled," as the Vir-

ginian would say. It was a very affectionate but mischievous pet. One day, in jumping a low paling fence, it snagged itself badly in the flank, and in its struggle to free itself a great wound was torn. I was at first tempted to try to play the doctor, washing the wound with a solution of carbolic, dressing it, and so forth. Then I thought of the wounded buck at Bowman's, and decided to leave the fawn alone. It had a habit every morning of going to a patch of oats in front of the house and there bedding down for the day—just like its mature relatives.

On that unfortunate morning, after I had freed it from the fence, it hobbled toward the oat patch, where it lay down, very much exhausted. Its heart, when I laid my hand on its flank, I could detect fluttering wildly. But it did not seem to be at all without resources. Instead of collapsing, it seemed self-possessed. Its bright eyes looked thoughtful, and no sooner was it couched than it began to dress its injury with its tongue. It went about this in the most careful, assiduous, and painstaking way, and continued it during the half hour that I watched it, and probably much longer. The chief purpose of this first-aid treatment appeared to be to cleanse the wound and to expose it as completely as possible to the healing air.

Of course, even though we observe something about wild life, we cannot be sure that our conclusions concerning it are correct. I see, and I think I understand, but a man ought to have some mental

reservations; for he should not imagine that he can decipher Nature's ancient mystic book infallibly. He's probably just a stumbling freshman, and his mind, instead of having wings like the eagle, is capable of but a trudging gait. Two equally good woodsmen, seeing the same incident in the wilds, may interpret its meaning in very different ways. Much of what we think about our wild brothers' ways must of necessity be mere hazard. Yet the same thing is probably true about the behaviour of our tame brothers as well.

Many a night I have stood in the wild, deserted rice-field banks of the great delta of the Santee to watch the wild fowl pouring into their night feeding grounds, and to salute occasionally an old green-head mallard. As the twilight fades, they begin to arrive from the sea in the warm waves and upon the sunny sands of which they have spent the day. They come in twos, threes, scores, hundreds. The dusk is thronged at last with myriads of wings making thin sweet music. Here, let us say, a mallard will be winged by a hunter. The duck falls into the watery marsh; and as dark is coming—but more especially because such a place is likely to be bottomless—no attempt is made to get the wounded duck. The best the hunter who attempts it would probably get would be a duckling. What is the future for that bird? He is merely a winter visitant. If he is injured, let us say, in December or in January, what chance has he of joining the migrating hosts northward in March?

If the bird is not badly wounded, and if he can

escape the ravages of the preyers, he will likely rejoin the northward hegira. But he has to be an expert dodger not to be caught by a prowling wildcat, by a bald eagle, by a cooper's hawk, or by a peregrine falcon. These last three, in the region described, live a lazy life in the winter, counting heavily upon wounded ducks for their bill of fare. Even if a hunter kills a duck and cannot find him at night, he is not likely to recover him in the morning unless he repairs to the field by daybreak. The wild foragers are about their work very early.

For many years I took an interest in the wounded ducks on the delta; and of these there was a considerable pension list. I tried to observe the progress of these invalids from time to time, and during several springs, long after the hosts had gone to their northern mating grounds, I found these belated mallards nesting on the delta, some fifteen hundred miles south of where their summer homes should have been. I believe that it is not often recorded that wild fowl, delayed by injury in a distant clime, remain there for the mating season.

A curious incident of first aid came to my notice several years ago. I had run a fence down into the river separating the pasture from the planted land. Only one of all the stock crowd discovered that it was possible to swim around the two panels of fence that projected into the water. I suppose that the others considered that the fence was prolonged indefinitely. This wily old creature was a half-wild razorback sow, a savage termagant that I had had under the

ban ever since I caught her killing and eating lambs. After all, the most relentlessly grim thing in the Southern woods is one of these razorbacks, all of which are berserker beasts, resourceful, courageous, and possessed of a certain terrible artfulness. This particular sow had swum many times into the cultivated lands, and to see her in action in a sweet-potato patch one might suppose that extensive dredging operations were in progress. Indeed, the only mistake Colonel Goethals made at Panama was in not taking down a few hungry razorbacks to root for him. I decided that if I could catch the old trespasser in the act of swimming round the end of the barrier fence, a load of small shot, discreetly administered, might teach her the desired lesson. I therefore got ready to try the experiment.

Very shortly after my decision, a negro called me to tell me that the wily sow was at her old trick again. I ran down toward the river just in time to see her emerge from the water. Seeing me, she turned, and at that moment I administered the dose of lead. To my horror, she sank to the ground. Later I discovered that I had slipped in the wrong cartridges; the shot was No. 2 instead of No. 8. I therefore had an invalid on my hands.

With a good deal of help, I managed to get the old creature into the stable lot, where she was bedded down on a heap of clean, dry straw under a shed. Then followed an attempt to nurse her. I did all that, under such conditions, one might be supposed to do. But the wounded thing languished. She refused feed.

Daily she lost ground. One day a negro said to me: "She will die here. If you turn her out she may get well. She may know what to do, and we don't know."

Following his advice, I opened the gate and the old sow dragged herself painfully out. Yet she seemed intent upon going. She evidently had in mind some remedy. She had. Down toward the river she went, an unsteady invalid. Into the shallow water she swayingly strode. She lay down in the running water, with her fevered wound against the current. Here she lay for two hours. Then she came out and lay in the sun only to return to the water after another hour. I watched the performance with a good deal of interest, and I watched her reaction to it. I may say that almost immediately she showed signs of returning strength. The food I now offered her she did not refuse. She stayed in that particular vicinity for about a week. By that time she was getting well fast. She then swam back into the pasture. When I next saw her, a month later, she was as husky and as hungry as ever; but she was shrewd enough to stay in the pasture. A wild thing, or even a half-wild thing, is not likely to commit the same gross error twice.

The expression "a bird with a broken wing" is supposed to typify a peculiarly helpless helplessness. Yet, as I have shown by the crippled wild ducks, such a bird often recovers; and that it is sometimes enabled once more to travel by the aërial route, we can be assured from observation. Many a time I have seen a bird with a wing obviously knit take the air.

There was a wild gobbler of my acquaintance that illustrates what I mean.

Very elusive, indeed, was our acquaintance; in terms of romance, my friend had hardly given me reason "to hope." Yet I saw him often. He came first across the river in a time of flood, and, finding on the plantation food in abundance and unusual quiet, he made up his mind that he liked the place. A master of the business of evasion, he kept his presence well disguised, but at last I knew him to be a resident. I used to see him walking with an alien grace beneath the live oaks in the pasture, and sometimes winging to roost in a big cypress on the river bank. But one day, driving in some stock, I saw the great bird struggling in a patch of shrubbery near the road. I pulled in my horse to watch him. He got loose, but clearly he showed that what had fouled him with the bush had been a broken wing. This was broken below the elbow. Some pineland poacher had been after him and had hailed him with leaden speech—with the result described.

I was interested to see whether this gobbler would recover the use of his wing. For some weeks I tried to keep the pasture quiet so that he would stay there, though I went myself a good many times to try to observe him. As there were many foxes there, I feared that one would get him at night. Undoubtedly this very thing would have happened but for a small interesting deceit practised by the turkey. Finding that he could no longer fly to roost, yet dreading to remain on the ground, he exercised his native wit to

enable him to escape those perils which come with the darkness. He probably felt keenly what Milton once expressed:

Of night or loneliness, it recks me not;
I fear the dread events that dog them both.

One twilight, down in the pasture prowling about, I heard a footfall among the leaves under the sparkleberry bushes. Subsiding on an old pine log, I had the satisfaction, a few minutes later, of watching his highness come stalking along. A wild turkey's air conveys a strange mixture of regality and furtiveness, a certain aspect of hunted majesty. Here he came, with great deliberateness, and his glistening black eyes were inspecting with some longing the huge oaks and the towering yellow pines, safely upon the boughs of which he had often roosted. There was something pathetic in the manner in which he looked at those trees. Glimmering palely under the sweet-smelling canopy of hollies and jasmine-covered sparkleberries, the light of fading day shone wanly and sadly. By its gleams the gobbler looked huge, almost startling. I could see him very distinctly, and he was in plain sight when he executed his manoeuvre that showed that he had the outwitting of Sir Reynard in mind.

About a hundred yards from where I was sitting, but in plain sight, there was a hurricane-thrown tree, a big pine that had been snapped off some twenty feet from the ground. The stump and bole were still joined by certain broad bands of stripped and shattered wood. The turkey came to this faded, dry tree-top. He stepped in. A moment or two later I saw him

with great precision walk up the incline. He followed this to the very top. But he did not stop there. About three feet away was the crest of a small holly, smothered in smilax. The gobbler looked the situation over carefully with discrimination. Then he took a little jump from the top of the high stump to the canopy of holly and smilax. He steadied himself here, working for a good footing, and at last he settled down on this place as a roost, assured, as he had a right to be, that he was safe from foxes. When he made his little leap I could see that he used one wing more than the other to lighten his weight; but the wounded one was evidently healing. In coming down from his roost, he may have blundered to the ground; but inasmuch as he wanted to rest his injured wing, I have no doubt that he retraced his steps to the ground by way of the inclined tree.

A month later, I saw him go to roost by the standard route. Apparently he had fully recovered the use of his wing. But the knitting of the bones must have been a crooked affair; for, whereas a turkey—even a ponderous one—makes little noise as a rule in taking the roost, this one set up a curious racket, the misshapen wing threshing the airwildly. Nevertheless, it did the work, and I had the satisfaction of seeing him alight, after his effort, on a live-oak limb some forty feet from the ground. Capable of such a rise, he could defy the whole race of foxes.

Among the wild animals of my acquaintance that are the most liable to injury, perhaps the raccoon

takes the lead. His path of life is beset with steel traps, and to prove how common is his encounter with this enemy, I may say that a reliable negro trapper lately told me that, of nine raccoons he had caught one week, seven were three-legged. All of these had, of course, been caught before, and had gnawed off their legs in order to escape. It is an ordinary thing, in a country where both negroes and raccoons are plentiful, to see a three-legged 'coon ambling along some obscure by-path, his naturally absurd racking gait thrown completely out of gear by the loss of a leg. Each one of the creatures so injured has managed to heal himself chiefly, I think, by rest and a scrupulous care of the wound, but partly also by the assistance that a superb natural vigour gives, and partly, perhaps, by eating leaves and fruits of laxative quality. A wounded bear, I know, will travel for miles until he finds certain medicinal plants on which he feeds. And I am persuaded that every wild creature is aware of such herbs, and knows very well for what they are good.

Mention has been made of the astonishing vitality of a wild creature. An injury that might speedily prove fatal to man, despite the most expert attention, a wild thing will weather handily. I remember shooting an old bull alligator one day while cruising in a canoe on the river. The bull was almost as long as the boat, and I wanted to get him home. Inasmuch as he had had his vitals invaded by five expanding bullets, I supposed that his spirit had fled. In the canoe with me was a negro paddler. I suggested to

him that we haul the 'gator into the canoe. Then I could sit on the apparently dead reptile while my man paddled us gingerly home. The negro was not in the least enthusiastic about my suggestion; nevertheless, we attempted the feat. All went well until we were in a particularly dangerous part of the river—at a place where the inflowing of a big creek made something of a maelstrom. At any time its current is hard to master. Just as my paddler was striving valiantly to keep our tippy craft from overturning or from shipping water, I felt a movement beneath me. My scaly cushion had suddenly decided to crawl overboard! The sensation I had at that moment should really have been recorded by some psycho-analyst. I had never experienced the same kind of thrill before, nor should I like to have it repeated.

Slowly, blindly, but with grim certainty, the big alligator drew himself out of the boat. There was no stopping him. Perhaps the smell of the affluent creek's flow had roused him; perhaps he was tired of my sitting on him. At any rate, he made up his mind to go. My paddler and I, communicating with each other by certain frantic looks, agreed to let him have his way. Our problem was how to let him go without drowning us.

He elected to leave over the right side of the canoe. I gave my ballast on the left, prepared for a sudden shift as soon as he should let go. Yet the affair was not quite so bad as had been the anticipation of it. A reptile always moves with grace, and this huge creature slithered over the gunwale of our boat in

standard serpentine fashion. Almost before we knew it he was gone, swallowed in the river's mysterious dark waters. I looked at my paddler. He didn't say "I told you so," but people can look that rebuke.

"Why didn't you hold his tail?" I asked.

The negro grinned. "A tail like that ain't done meant to hold," he answered, with sound philosophy.

As far as my observation extends, wild creatures recover with extraordinary rapidity from all ordinary flesh wounds. When bones are broken, or when some trouble reaches the vitals, the case is very different. Yet I have cited cases of recovery from serious injury; and there must be many such recoveries. Yet, inasmuch as a wild thing constantly requires all its resources to enable it to avoid its enemies, I feel that any handicap in a physical way is a serious one. There are prowlers and marauders that support their brigand life by preying on the wounded and the helpless. There are no hospitals and sanitariums in the wilds, and what is accomplished in the way of recovery must be done by the individual, and the individual will be beleaguered by a thousand dangers during his convalescence. Indeed, wild creatures are as much exposed to new and strange perils at such a time as a human being is protected from them. They not only have to recover from the hurt inflicted, but they need to use all their artful ingenuity to shield them from those dangers to which their condition has rendered them liable.

I was much interested in the simple case of a dove

that, in flying against some object, had torn the strip of skin joining the lower wing to the upper wing. As all of us know, when a bird's wings are extended the bones of it are really crooked. The injury in question had prevented the proper flexure of the wounded wing. I caught the bird and examined it. It could then fly a little, but seemed determined not to fly much. Upon examination, I found that the wing had already partly healed. Brought home and put in a big, open field in front of the house, the dove stayed in that immediate neighbourhood for about two weeks. I saw it nearly every day, and observed that it seemed to practise a little flying. At last it wholly recovered the use of its wing. As this bird was under observation for some time, I learned from it something of the care that a wounded thing takes of itself.

For many months on the plantation one winter we suffered from the raids on the chicken roost, and as the chickens were high off the ground, in trees close to the house, I knew that foxes, red, gray, or black—of the African strain—could not be blamed. At last I shot the marauder one moonlight night. A huge horned owl it was, a stately presence, with the demeanour of Charlemagne. My shot brought him down and I caught him. Later I discovered that he was wounded in the side. I put him in a big box with a wire front, and many an hour I watched him. He was really something to watch. He radiated erudition in so high tension a fashion that I exposed myself to his rays. On the low perch that I had fixed for him he would sit, eyeing me with regal candour, with

Olympian condescension. Let those who think that a caged lion looks majestic observe one of these great birds. Entirely new and elevated ideas concerning grandeur will at once be conceived.

Daily, for an hour at a time, he preened himself solemnly, and it was then that he gave attention to his wound. With his hooked beak he brushed the feathers back nicely from it. As far as I could discover, his chief concern was in keeping the wound exposed. All these creatures know that air is the mighty oxidizer. Indeed, in its pure state, air is Nature's great cleanser and healer.

This imposing captive of mine escaped in a rather absurd way. I was feeding him, with the door of his cage wide open. Someone called me. I looked around. A moment later the great owl, swift to see his chance, flew out over my shoulder. I never saw him again. But I know that "in the dead vast and middle of the night" he probably visited me frequently to select whatever I had choice in the poultry line. I expect he is still alive, as prodigiously wise as ever, perched high among the shrouding mosses of the live oaks in the avenue at home, or in a giant yellow pine on the edges of the mystic mouldering swamp. I confess that I share the feeling of the negro who thus described his persuasion concerning a horned owl: "Dat ain't no bird! Dat is somebody. If he ain't done is somebody, he done is somebody's hant!"

You take your choice.

IX

GOOD TIMES

I REMEMBER seeing one day a very appealing wild family that appeared to be having a mighty good time. My making this observation was purely a matter of chance. I had gone alone into the great sea-marshes near Bull's Bay to catch with a castnet at low tides the fish that the receding tide had left in certain holes in the marsh. The school-bass feeds in the marsh at high tide, and is sometimes left in these pockets. My walk through the marsh had been really a floundering through a bog; and when I came to the first pond I was exhausted. I sat down beneath a reedy canopy to rest before beginning operations with the fish. While thus waiting, I had sudden visitors.

Directly across the placid pond, and some twenty yards away, a mother mink appeared, a sleek graceful creature, timorous and fugitive. But I could tell from her behaviour that her own safety was not the only matter engaging her attention. She stepped daintily into the shallow water, and then paused to look back. Through the tiny dim marsh aisles came her babies, elfin infants with glistening coats, bright eyes, and an air of nervous alertness. Seven little brown elfs

crowded excitedly behind their mother for all the world like a lot of children behind a fond and anxious parent at a bathing beach. Though minks aren't exactly born in the water, they are born to it; and I knew that these youngsters could swim. But to circle the pond appeared so much easier than to swim it that I wondered just what this present game would be.

They were not going anywhere. They were just out for a frolic. Lithely the mother took the water, with so much ease that the water parted before her in smooth ripples. Behind her valiantly came the whole family. I never saw anything more cunning than those tiny sleek heads, which were now chiefly nothing but lustrous black eyes. Reaching the middle of the still water, the mother executed a sudden hump dive, and every little mink gracefully followed suit. One good-sized tail and seven little ones gave in concert a flirt in the air and then vanished; also, certain little black feet, having not gained their full skill, sprawled for a moment ere they disappeared beneath the water.

In a moment the family reappeared, and as if a signal had been given they began to frolic. They leaped, they turned somersaults in the air and on the surface of the pond, they seemed to do some shadow-boxing, they wrestled with one another and ducked one another; they swam in circles swiftly, dived, squeaked merrily now and then, and made the calm waters of the pond dance with their fun. They were having a high old time, all by themselves, here in

the silent heart of the monstrous lonely marsh. After a time the mother swam for shore and lay basking on the brim of the lapping water. The children continued to play until, in the order of their weariness they repaired to the shore, where they lay down beside her. As each came in from swimming, she nuzzled it tenderly, stroked with her tongue its glistening brown fur, and gazed upon it with that especial delight that every mother knows, and that perhaps no father ever quite experiences.

Another family that I came across one day was a family of baby wood ducks, than which there is perhaps nothing more appealing among wildwood sights to charm the observer.

Only about a mile from home there is a large lake in the woods. It is called Wambaw Reserve, and it was made by damming a stream of the pinelands. The water used to be drawn off in the culture of rice; now, as the ancient bank still holds, the huge lagoon remains intact. It is grown to moss-hung cypresses, and its many arms are extended mistily far into lonely recesses of the wood. This lake is a favourite haunt of the wood duck, and since boyhood I have observed them there. Well I remember paddling one day up the still waters, black as ebony, and coming suddenly, upon rounding a bend where tall marsh grew, upon a family of wood ducks disporting themselves. The old male rose and flew far away. The mother fluttered and flapped on the surface of the water, pretending that she was helplessly wounded and trying by her

pathetic manœuvres to make me leave her babies alone. No wonder she loved them. Such babies!

Eleven little balls of black fur, with beady eyes, tiny glistening bills, elfin webbed feet. They were just out of the nest (from which they had either been pushed or carried by the parent birds), and they seemed to be enjoying the water hugely. Fluffy little fairies they were, not much bigger than hulled walnuts.

Upon sight of me, some of them swam away speedily and with the most amusing wise expression on their cunning little features; others turned to dive. Such diving! Inexpert and too light to make themselves sink, they merely tipped up, rolled over, tipped again, with their tiny feet kicking valiantly in the air, sank their heads, and went steaming off with their backs and comic tails high. It was pathetic and diverting to watch them. The mother meanwhile had managed to "catch their eye," and I soon saw that she was trying to get them to follow her into an estuary behind the marsh. She called softly, warningly. Off they swam, obedient, dear children, and soon the last of them was hidden by the friendly screen of the rustling marsh.

Our own enjoyment of life can measurably be deepened by knowing of the joy of others. For my part, I often take my troubles into the woods—and leave them there. Emerging, I have a sense that Nature has pillaged me of a lot of useless luggage, not the least part of which is one's natural but wearisome

self-esteem. The delicate grace of heart that we all have as children may come stealing home again. Into the heart may come a hush a little stiller than the silence of the forest, a music deeper than that of the sea wind in the yellow pines.

One day, not far from home, I was driving down a sandy road through the pinelands. Suddenly, as I neared a lonely cabin, a spotted fawn sped out of the bushes and across the road. I watched the fawn go into the yard by the cabin, and then walk calmly up the steps, cross the porch, and enter the house. When I reached the place, I saw the owner in the yard, and asked him about the fawn.

"Oh, that," he said, smiling, "that's the baby's pet. I think you'd find them both under the dining-room table right now. They sleep there together a good deal in the daytime. If the baby wakes first, he will pull the fawn's ears and wake him, but if the fawn wakes first, he will lie still until his partner opens his eyes. The baby generally sleeps with his head on the fawn's flank. We call them 'the twins.' They have lots of good times together, those two."

Many wild things express their joy in sheer speed, in the glad exertion of their superb physical perfection. They delight in the triumph of it; and they manifest their enjoyment in ways unmistakable. I have often watched with envious wonder wild turkeys coming off their roost on wooded mountain slopes.

Just as the sun begins to kindle the lonely pines standing like a thin fringe on the mountain ridges, while the deep hollows are still full of mists and heavy

shade, the great birds launch themselves into the morning heavens. They might easily drop to earth a hundred yards or so from where they have roosted. But they prefer to take an invigorating morning dip in the glorious sea of the air. They do some flapping of their powerful wings to secure elevation; then, setting their wings into a curve, they volplane down the mountain, the wind through their pinions roaring. Such a flight is not slower than a hundred miles an hour. Two miles they may go; then, in concert, gracefully "banking," they turn and come to earth. No living thing could fail to enjoy the keen thrill of such sailing. Curiously, while thus wildly coasting, turkeys sometimes call, or rather set up a joyous gabbling. I have never at any other time thus heard them call on the wing. Perhaps they are saying, "This is the life! It gives one an appetite for breakfast! Let's try this every morning—and more of it."

On summer days I have watched, fascinated, the high soaring of a hawk, apparently sleeping on mystic wings, tirelessly turning with the grace that belongs wholly to experts of the air. In all the loneliness of wings he would sweep "the long savannas of the blue," buoyant and joyous. Feeling the final freedom that comes only from complete mastery of an art, he could not but enjoy, while pendent in the heavens, his stili view of the pendent earth beneath him.

Catching wild things off their guard and appreciating their enjoyment of life sometimes makes me slightly envious of their lot. Walt Whitman felt this when he said, "I think I could turn and live with the

animals." Though criticized much for his wish, he probably had in mind their extraordinary sanity, cleanliness, normalness; their power of restraint, their decent reticence, their unschemed joy, their astonishing ability to live their lives perfectly. They may be evolving, but they do not weary themselves disputing the business.

I remember how much I enjoyed a wild-life scene early one morning. The business really began on a Pullman, when an ebony ham of a hand nudged me with clumsy gentleness.

"Is you the gen'man what gets off to Oakley?"

"Yes," I responded drowsily. "Where are we now, porter?"

He then told me, as any Pullman porter will tell anyone, that he had not forgotten to waken me but that I had just three minutes to dress. In fumbling haste I dressed; and while so doing the huge engine on the Florida special shrieked for the station. In two minutes more I was standing beside the track while the rear lights of the train glimmered away southward.

It was barely dawn, and I was in Oakley. I looked carefully, even scrupulously, for Oakley. It may be some day, or it may have been; but at that time Oakley simply wasn't. Yet I never did care very much for houses, being too busy most of the time admiring the handiwork of the Architect of Creation. Stretching away on every side lay the misty alluring southern landscape, dim and romantic. The lilac heavens wore

the morning star as the Madonna might wear a jewel. Great pines towered momentarily into the blue silence of the sky. The woods seemed waiting for me.

The afternoon before, I had left Washington in something of a blizzard; and the Richmond evening paper had supplied me with the latest word in debt settlements and other crimes. Here I seemed in a different world. The air was balmy, aromatic. I could hear the faint sweet singing of half-awakened birds. Alone I was with the ancient dawn; with things pure and elemental and changeless in their beauty; with the stars and the trees, with the silence and the music of Nature. I remember how my heart suddenly beat with the warmest affection for an old bullfrog, somewhere in a pond off in the pines, detonating amiably. In his own way he seemed to be saying that, as far as he was concerned, the world is just the place in which to live.

It is good for a man to be alone at dawn in a wild country. Humbly he can then say in his heart: "I am nothing. All my wishes are just vanity. Whatever God wills, Who made this earth and this sky, these woods and these wild creatures, must be right and just. I am not going to think and worry. I am going to love beautiful things, for I believe that he who loves beauty is holding fast the hand of God."

My purpose in coming to Oakley was simple: I had been invited by an old friend to visit his ducking field, in which, for years, no shooting had been permitted. This friend of mine, Nathaniel Heyward, an expert woodsman and a most intelligent observer of

wild life, had for some seasons planted his old waste rice fields to that kind of wild feed that ducks most enjoy. Advised by the Department of Agriculture in Washington, he had sowed waterlilies, duck-oats, lotus, wild rice, and some tame rice. The field was naturally rich in wampee and calamus and marsh. An hour after I left the train, I was standing with my friend on the borders of his wild-duck Riviera; and this idyllic scene was just a little way from the high-road to Florida, dusty and jammed with amazing traffic.

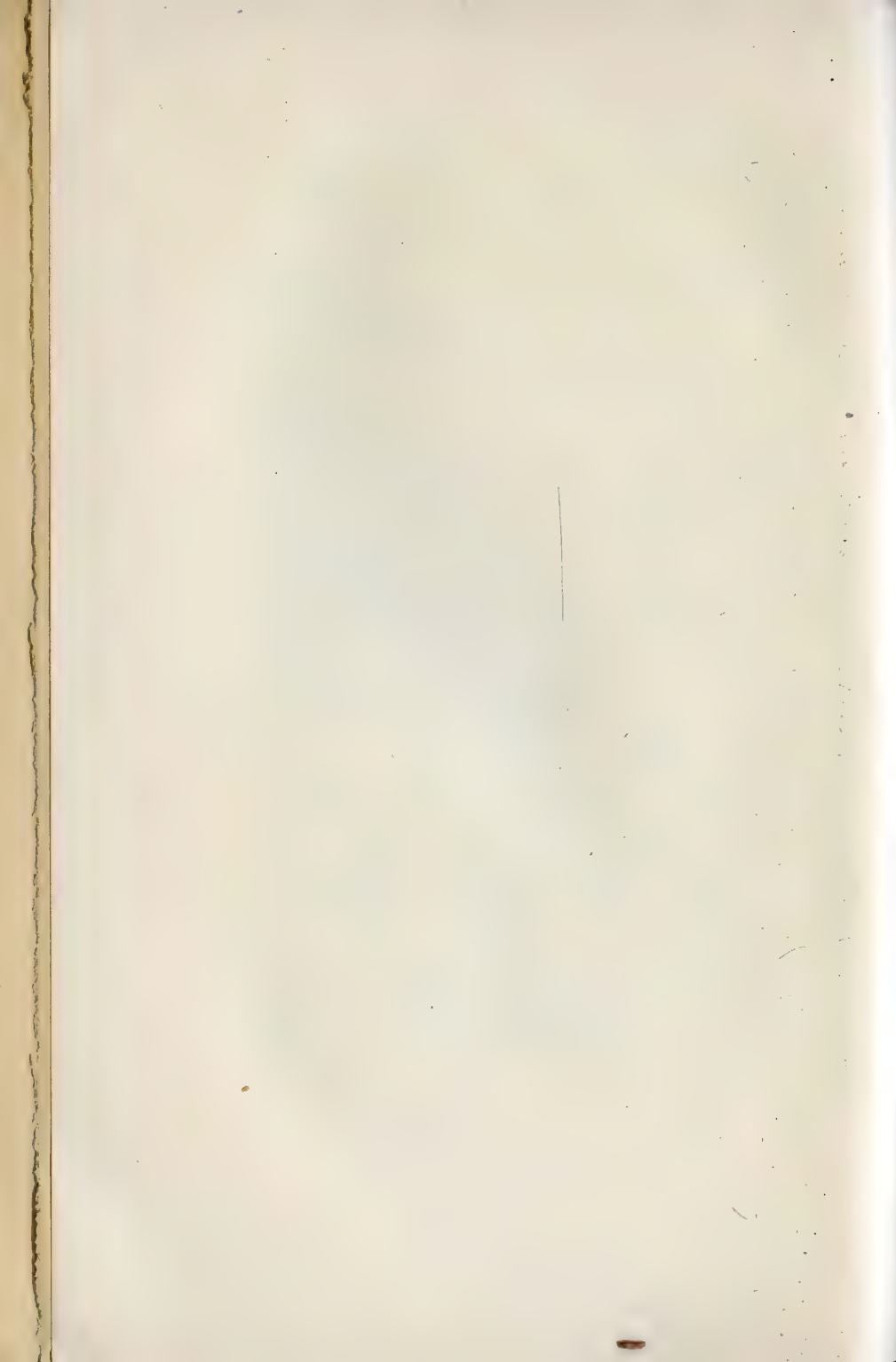
"I want you to see this before breakfast," said Heyward. "It will give you an appetite after a night on the sleeper."

Before us in the roseate light of the new day lay a spacious level field, at least a hundred acres in extent. It was flooded with fresh water from the adjacent river. On three sides were deep woods; I noticed that as the sun rose, the little leaves fringing the forest seemed to glint rejoicingly in the lustrous gloom. A long grassy bank, vividly green, its crest only a few inches above the tide, ran down the middle of the field. Here and there were beds of fragrant aquatic plants. A wind out of the spicy pine forest breathed over the field. Then I saw the dwellers in this sanctuary. Thousands upon thousands of mallards and black ducks, teal and widgeons, shovellers and pintails were floating placidly on the waters, idly dipping among the reedy flocs, basking on the low bank, foraging in the beds of wampee and waterlilies. They seemed strangely silent. Only now and then one called



Photo by Underwood & Underwood

DUCKS IN FLIGHT



in drowsy happiness. They had come two thousand miles to this place to winter. I remembered the hundreds of tourists that I had seen streaming, in more or less dishevelment, and heavily laden, toward Florida. Here, I thought, was perhaps a more fortunate gathering. They were their own means of transportation; they carried no luggage; they had found what they wanted—water, food, rest. Here in this delicious place they would stay until the springtime; when, donning their gorgeous nuptial plumage, they would make their pilgrimage of glamour northward again.

For several years, during my boyhood on the plantation, I used to be entertained pretty constantly by the behaviour of an old black goat that lorded it over all the lesser beings that roamed the ample yard. He used to butt me with the most virtuous consistency until I bought him off with lumps of sugar. But he never ceased to scare the negroes. Our place was the only dwelling of white people within many miles, whereas hundreds of negroes inhabited the same area. They were continually coming to the Great House—for food, for medicine, just so, sometimes to work. It was the black goat's delight to entertain the dusky visitors, and to be diverted by them.

We called this natural comedian Thunder, because of his lowering aspect and his colour scheme. To the negroes he was always "Tunder." And he was the terror of all those who did not see through the deep, sardonic game he was playing. To begin with, his approach was always insidious.

Upon seeing a stranger coming, he never made at him. He was never so rude as to try the "Have-at-you!" game. But, casually surveying his victim with an invidious eye, he would begin sidling tactics. Executing a flank movement, his artful duplicity unsuspected, he would wait until his guileless victim had passed. Then, head suddenly down and back humped, he would dash in. To see him go through this subterfuge, and then butt a man flat, was almost monotonous, it was so commonplace. I remember a negro minister who had been warned to beware of the goat. The man's character was such that he and Thunder were soul-mates. To see them meet was to see a display of double side-stepping. Each seemed to know that the other was a rascal. Each knew that the other's indifference was pure artifice. Brothers in obliqueness and in turpitude, they were wary of each other. But Thunder got the better of the encounter. While the preacher was much on his dignity, trying to engage a plantation belle in conversation, a hurricane routed him from the rear.

Thunder enjoyed his fakir tactics hugely. He was not vicious. But he loved to dissemble. And he had acquired amazing finesse in artificiality. I recall seeing him one day waylay our new cook. He had a way of taking a stand at the corner of the house, where he would wait for some victim to round the corner. Full of ambushes and stratagems was Thunder. To him suddenly appeared the cook, a coal-black woman of ample stature. Thunder charged. The cook had in her hand a big iron spoon of the sort with which major

operations in the kitchen are managed. This she brought down mightily on the goat's nose. The blow almost blinded him. From that day forward he eschewed that rude woman's society. He pretended to treat her with scornful indifference, while she would salute him, from a safe distance, with all kinds of outrageous epithets.

A strange, ironic creature was Thunder. I know he must have chuckled to himself at the consternation that he caused; and I have been almost as sure that, beneath his dishonest eye and above his straggly reverent beard, I could catch the glimmer of a Voltaire-like withering smile.

Down in Hampton Park, in Charleston, there used to be an interesting collection of wild things in cages. Of these, I most enjoyed watching an otter, that had been caught in a neighbouring river, and had been placed in a rather good pen, well supplied with water. Of course, he missed his wild free life; but he had no enemies in captivity; and his playfulness, the otter's chief characteristic, did not desert him when he was confined. One day I missed him. Hunting up the keeper, I asked what had become of my frolicsome friend. He was a good keeper, for he had an understanding heart.

"He's right over here," he answered, "in a new pen I made for him. You see, when I was a boy, I once watched a wild otter slide down a bank, hitting the water with a splash, and climbing up again, and doing the same thing, having the time of his life. So I

just figured that if I made a slide for this old boy, he'd get a lot of fun out of it. He's just the other side of the live-oak there."

Walking over quietly I saw a sight both amusing and pathetic. The big otter was in a larger pen, with a wooden chute leading down into a tank. He was not only sliding, but sliding to make up for lost time! When he wasn't hitting the water, he was either scuttling up the side of the trough or sailing down the middle of it. He was having the time of his life. And I didn't know to whom my heart went out more—the otter, or the keeper who understood how to give him the fun that he most enjoyed.

I wonder if in this little incident the mink concerned did not find some sly enjoyment. I have a very good friend who for many years was a keeper of Romain Lighthouse, off the Carolina coast. Romain Island, where for so long he was in that mild imprisonment which any island life entails, is rather small, heavily grown to sweet myrtles, and contains several fine sheltered ponds into which on cold days wild ducks love to come. One January day he was shooting ducks at one of these ponds, and to him there came a big mallard drake. He shot it, and the fine bird fell dead in the centre of the pond, some twenty yards away from his stand. While he was trying to decide whether he should wade out for the duck then or wait until the morning flight was over, from the farther edge of the pond suddenly emerged a little brown shape. It was a mink, and straight for the duck it

swam. In a moment the mink had actually retrieved the duck and was fast swimming for the shore. So great was the hunter's amazement and amusement that he let the little creature escape with its prey. The mink, dragging its heavy burden into the marsh, disappeared. This incident shows that often in wild country, where the sound of a gun is unfamiliar, wild creatures have no fear of it; at least they do not associate it with imminent danger.

When one is really fascinated by a subject, as I have been with this of good times among animals, one must be careful not to attribute motives merely to fit the theme. I believe I am still within the limits of reason in my interpretation of the following scene which appealed to me as manifesting, not merely regular playfulness, but rather rapturous enjoyment.

It was Christmas Eve. I wasn't on a crowded sleeper, screeching homeward. I was in the hushed heart of a lonely swamp, looking at the greatest Christmas tree I ever saw. Most people suppose that hollies are more or less bush-like in their growth, seldom attaining anything like real height. Here, however, in a sunny glade that afforded ample room for development, was a superb tree, sixty feet high, cone-shaped, with great branches that spread fan-wise to the ground. Its bark was silvery. Lustrous and luxurious, its foliage had that deep beryl tint that tells of a tree's perfect health. And it was loaded with scarlet berries. It was a regular Christmas riot, though standing here afar in the solitary swamp; and I knew that, for that

year at least, no one else save me would view it. For that matter, I doubt if another human being had ever noticed it before. Yet for all its lonely situation its beauty and abundance were fully appreciated. Indeed, it was the ecstatic singing that I heard that first drew me toward it.

Circling it at a convenient distance were black gums, elms, tupelos, and cypresses. From these trees to the great holly continuous myriads of robins were passing, hundreds—nay, thousands—calling, singing, feasting, speeding through the joyous gloom of the tree's shade in deft and happy flight. The air was filled with a soft, affectionate uproar. From the circling trees came cascades of singing from birds which, having broken their fast, had taken time off to tell, in lyric abandon, with a certain deliciously amiable lassitude of soul, what they thought of life. Joining the robins were hosts of cedar-waxwings and a few shy wood-thrushes. Never had I seen such a festival before; never so much unreflecting joy, unstudied peace of heart, spontaneous bliss. Were they having a good time? Why not? Fled from ice and snow, basking in semi-tropical winter sunshine, with abundant food, with no enemies, with endless comradeship, theirs was every chance for happiness. And if they wearied of holly berries to eat, there were the scarlet ones of the big swamp briar, the winy ones of the sweet gum, the pale cold berries of the mystic mistletoe.

Watching these ecstatic robins, their red breasts pulsating with joy, I could not help feeling that in

the vast scheme of things the Creator was mindful to provide not only the means of happiness for the creatures of the wild, but likewise the capacity for deep enjoyment. That towering Christmas tree, shimmering in the sunlight, alive with hosts of wandering minstrels—how could any mortal look at it without knowing that, behind the obvious veil of Nature's beauty, everywhere, at all times, there moves at work a supernal Mind. Shadowy almighty hands shape such a tree; nor from any other source could the oak lift his massive crown. Something is under Nature's cloak that all science does not account for. We feel it when we view a scene like this; or when we see in a timid wildflower premonitions of intimate grace; or when the dreams of the human soul tremble forth in some kind of art, that is akin to the astral, because it had its origin somewhere beyond this life, and is a glimmering fringe of that Beauty which is the garment of the Eternal.

A very odd, a really spectacular playfulness used to be shown by a pet buck that I had for years on the plantation. He used to be into all sorts of mischief such as pushing, one by one, apparently just to hear them fall, every geranium pot off the big stand in the front porch. But his chief diversion was making the hounds chase him! I can see him now, on a frosty autumn morning, with evident artfulness in his eye, approaching an old hound lying asleep in the morning sunshine in the lee of a rice stack. Arching his neck until it bulged, lowering his horns, blowing out his nostrils, widening his eyes until they were astonish-

ingly big and black, he would approach the dog, stepping with fake pride and menace. He would paw the ground, snort, do everything to break the blameless slumbers of the old hound.

At last the dog would rouse himself, and the chase would begin. As soon as the hound got to his feet, the deer would make a jump at him, with a fierceness that was patently artificial. Then he would turn and run in a panic, also feigned. The hound would follow, and soon every dog in the big plantation yard would join the chase. Over the fields, through thickets, across fences, along the river bank they would race for a half hour or so. Then the buck would head for the yard, and as he approached it, he would slacken his speed, the dogs would slow up, and the whole business would end as amicably as the best-regulated game. The deer never went very far from the house; the dogs never actually tried to catch him. One and all, they were just having a good time.

On one occasion a strange dog joined the pack, and when the buck called the race off, this intruder tried to start something, whereupon the oldest hound in the pack turned upon him and gave him a sound thrashing. I never saw a dog do a more sagacious thing. Yet who would imagine that one hound would savagely defend a deer from another hound?

Perhaps most of the joy in human life is the joy that comes from some form of self-expression; nor is the matter different with the children of the wild. They utter their strength, their speed, their craft in

a hundred ways. The singing of birds is, of course, the most obvious form of joyous utterance, the purposeless glad outburst of beauty in music. The bob-white on the vine-covered fencepost; the tiny wren on the bending tip of a lilac bush; the wood-thrush in the fragrant gloom of the hemlock—all these tell us what life means to them.

I suppose that the greatest longing in our hearts is for self-expression. A man wants to voice himself before he dies. Art has no higher aim, and all of us, in the sense that we yearn to speak ourselves, are trying to say, in some fashion, what we know and feel—whether we speak in words or in music or in steel bridges or in towering buildings or in sympathetic understanding. In the end it will be found that every man has, at his best, tried to voice his dream, express his spirit. It is not different in the great natural world. Shy, hunted, fearful, aware of many an imminent danger, these wild things have a longing to be heard. Some of them, in silence, express the simple glory of being beautiful. Others create beauty, than which there can be no higher achievement. It has seemed to me that the birds not only voice their own joy in song but they manage to express a part of the loveliness that has inspired them. At this moment, as I am writing these words on the borders of a shadowy pine copse, I can hear a wood-thrush fluting. Singing in that dim scented place, he gets into his tone something of the dewiness of twilight, the damp fragrance of the exhaling earth, the silvery enchantment of the evening star.

X

RADIO OF THE WILD

BEFORE Claude Marlowe said a word, I knew that something grim had happened. Men don't look as he did if they have been picking violets; but they may wear that aspect, if after a physical battle lasting the better part of an hour, they have dispatched a nine-foot diamond-back rattler. This feat Marlowe, a pinelander, had just performed. By nature unemotional, yet now he was deeply stirred.

"I don't like it," he said; "the thing fought too hard for life, and he tried a hundred times to kill me. It makes a man a little nervous."

Together we rode down the lonely pine-trashed road—I to hear his story, and he to see a negro named Sam Washington, who lived about a mile from the place where the great rattler had just been killed. When we came upon Washington, we could see that something had happened to him. Squat and jovial by nature, always ready with an infectious smile, he looked strangely bleak as he stood under a live-oak awaiting our approach.

"You come for to see me 'bout dat cow?" he asked. "Cap'n, I must steady myself befo' I go git dat cow."

Rattlesnake and me had a ramblin' and a wrastlin' jest now."

"A big one?" I asked, feeling sure that the negro had encountered the mate of the one Marlowe had killed.

"I 'most step on him," he said with a shudder. "He big as I is," he added with vague but impressive description.

"And did you kill him, Sam?" Marlowe asked.

"I think so," the negro returned; "but I ain't so sure."

Piloted by Sam, we gingerly stepped through a labyrinth of huckleberry bushes behind his house, where, he said, he had encountered the reptile. We came, indeed, upon signs of a bitter struggle; but the victim had recovered. Search as we might (and our search was decidedly circumspect in those thick bushes), we could not find the snake. However, I decided to put to a test my theory.

Claude's snake had crossed the road before meeting its fate; this escaped rattler would do the same, I thought. A rattler is a slow mover; I've watched a huge one dragging his length over a pine log, and it seemed as if he would never complete the manœuvre.

Early the next day I revisited the scene of Marlowe's encounter. Plainly in the road was the track of his snake. Not a foot away from it was a fresher track of the same size. The rattler leaves a slot almost straight; it appears beneath the majesty of such a serpent to wriggle. Instead of contorting himself for

purposes of locomotion, he literally walks on the tips of his ribs, or at least on their lower curves. These bones are so articulated that voluntary movement along lateral lines is possible. The harsh layers of skin, with their prehensile edges turned back, naturally assist the snake in "taking hold." But his method of movement was to me less interesting than the manner in which he had followed his mate. Patently this had been by the sense of smell. Yet the amazing precision of his performance leads one to inquire deeper into this mysterious subject—asking the general question, How do wild creatures manage infallibly to communicate with one another?

Even a cursory examination of this fascinating subject will reveal that there are two senses, possibly three, which make possible this radio of the wild; and the development of sense most necessary for any creature easily to communicate with its fellows is determined, or appears to be, by the creature's environment. In birds, which have the lonely elevation afforded by wings, the power of sight is the sense most keenly developed; the sense of hearing, especially in game birds, is also remarkable. Birds get together by calling, listening, and by seeing. It is very difficult with other wild creatures. Apparently birds have hardly any sense of smell; at least it is not remarkable; and Darwin, I believe, proved that a vulture depends upon his eyesight rather than upon his sense of smell to detect carrion. Creatures without wings have the sense of smell abnormally developed. This marvellous power we see manifested in dogs.

A bloodhound will take a trail full two days old; and even a cur of the lowest degree will find his master in a crowd.

If now we consider a typical wild creature such as our familiar friend, the whitetail deer, we shall observe how the sense of smell serves as his "guide, philosopher, and friend." The embodiment of all that is silent, crafty, elusive, ghostly, the deer steals from shadow to shadow, himself a wraith. In his goings and comings, his eyesight does not assist him much. In territory where he is hunted, he seldom moves voluntarily by day; he is of the night. Of course, he can see in the dark, but not as the owl can. His power of vision appears to be adjusted to half-lights; to moonlight, dim dawn, dusky twilight. Even in the blaze of noonday his sight is slow to detect anything but movement.

Long familiar with the wary woodland tricks of a buck, I was not amazed one day to see a thing that would have surprised one less aware of a stag's sagacity and that marvellous sense which this sagacity employs.

In front of a big yellow pine I was standing drenching my soul and body in the balmy sunshine of a southern midwinter's morning. Before me shimmered and sparkled a long dewy copse of sweet-bays and myrtles. At the farther end of this my negro huntsman was whistling and shouting to his four hounds. Already they were trailing, and from the degree of their enthusiasm I judged that they would start deer before they reached me. It was so. Ere the dogs

came to the deep bay head out of which shot the tall treebays, and in which had been obscurely bedded the whitetails, the wary creatures silently stole out of the forehead of the thicket. Two does, a spike buck, and a regal old master thus faced me. After a moment or two of hesitation the does and the young buck came straight on. But the old stag faded back into the thicket.

When a whitetail buck believes himself to be in pressing danger, he will not behave in some standardized fashion: he will respond intelligently to the exigency of the moment. If he is in a drive with other deer, this hart royal may emerge first from the sheltering thicket, he may come out last, he may not come out at all; or, while his comrades are flying forward, he may sink back to the rear, or out of one side, often skulking silently past shouting drivers and clamouring dogs.

With that powerful, lithe grace characteristic of their kind, the three deer came by me. I had a gun, but the fire thereof was withheld. Had not my covetous eyes measured antlers that would make real trophies? Far away in the glimmering forest the flying deer faded, vanished. Out of the copse-head came the frantic hounds, telling the world vociferously yet musically of the amazing discovery they had just made. To the resentful astonishment of the lavish dogs, I stopped them. With emotions apparently similar to the hounds' my driver approached.

"I saw them, Prince," I explained to allay his chagrin, "but the real deer is still in the thicket.

I'll go to the other end. Give me time; then drive back to me."

A damp, sandy road runs by the trail of the copse. When I reached this, I saw the dashed, sprawling tracks of the huge buck in full flight; but a deer's flight, unless the creature is wounded, is rarely incontinent. This ancient friend of mine had not stayed upon the order of his going. The others had escaped because they had been permitted to do so. He owed his escape to his intellect.

"Prince," I said, when, after a vain scouring of the thicket, my driver reached me, "you keep the other dogs while I take Blue after this old stag."

A buckhide thong made a leash for the hound Blue. Letting him have his nose, I followed through the dewy grasses, by fragrantly brushing bays, through shallow watercourses. The buck was running on an arc. A half mile from the thicket head whence his companions had emerged he had taken their track.

This deer, then, had done two remarkable things: he had completely evaded his enemies and he had rejoined his companions with ease, swiftness, and directness. He had, in a sense, communicated with them by overtaking them. And the sense of smell enabled him to perform this feat—after his sense of direction had given him a few preliminary suggestions. For it is true that every intelligent wild creature, in having a sense of direction, possesses an infallible compass. But the sense of smell is what does the fine work. By it a deer is not only able to follow the trail of another deer, many hours old, but he can

follow a particular individual. Of course, the auras of bucks and does is radically different, especially in the mating season, but always each individual wild creature has its own aura, and this must be readily recognizable to the members of its tribe.

Reference has just been made to communication in the mating season. It is at this time that all wild creatures are most indifferent to danger. Were not closed seasons coincident with this period of mating, the wariest of the wild folk could easily be taken. For example, in the autumn it is well-nigh impossible to call up an old gobbler. A young turkey will come running perhaps, but the lordly old monarch will be excessively modest and retiring. Yet if the same call be sounded in late March or early April, the most Merlin-like of these splendid birds will rush precipitately toward your Vivien-voice. More than once I have had an old gobbler fly to me from a roost or from the ground at a distance not less than half a mile from where I was calling. I have had one come running to me like Man-o'-War, and pausing in a sunny glade near me, strut and gobble, gobble and strut, in a very ecstasy of voluptuous passion. But at other seasons the lure of the call is lacking. A scattered flock will indeed pipe to one another and gather, but the eagerness and glamour attendant upon a lovers' meeting are absent.

It is in the mating season (or on warm autumn days reminiscent of the sweet, impassioned ones of the springtime) that the grouse does most of his



REFLECTIONS

drumming. In this strange and haunting call (for it is nothing else) this princely bird finds a voice for the lonely hillside, the forsaken clearing, the desolate glen, sometimes a boastful challenge, perhaps; sometimes an exuberant expression of the season's stress; sometimes perhaps a superior performance pleasing to the bird's fancy and vanity. I am persuaded that primarily the drumming is a kind of communication, and by no means always between the sexes, or from one proud male to a rival. Many a time I have flushed a lone grouse, have spotted his place of alighting, and have heard him begin to drum almost immediately. Was he trying to get into touch with his fellows? Was he pridefully deriding and defying me? I incline to the former view.

In certain wild creatures radioing occurs in the mating season only. Love sunders their silence. I am thinking of one of those monsters that have survived the comic changes of the ages, the alligator, a reptile that is as extraordinary as any now living. Since boyhood I have known him in the great delta of the Santee; have hunted him mercilessly, I fear, with rifle and with fishing line; have found the female's wonderful nest with its big snakelike eggs; have watched a big male stalk wood ducks asleep on the mirroring surface of a placid, dreadful lagoon; have heard the mighty bulls bellowing over the waste reedland country of the wild delta wilderness. No sound is quite so savage and masterfully impressive as the roar of an old bull alligator. From careful observation I have determined that the alligator usually

sings his solo as he lies on the surface of the water. But he is so very wary that, during more than thirty years of prowling in his haunts, in which time I have observed countless individuals, I never actually saw but one bull roaring. This bull was lying on the surface of the river; and as he bellowed, his body seemed to distend as a frog's does when he is croaking.

Daily, human methods of communication are improved; and our advance in this respect means the retreat of the wild creatures. Remote valleys and mountains now waken to the motor's horn, and every such invasion means that the children of the wild have to be more wary, and as a result, less communicative: As civilization advances, our little brothers and sisters of the wild retire, and he who would understand their language must have the patience of one who is beginning to learn something of a mighty mystery. Listening in upon the greatest aërial in the world, he is catching a few messages from the radio of the wild.

XI

WATCHMEN

THIS story I have from a famous huntsman of Alabama, who, despite the negro aphorism, "A gunnerman will lie," is no relative of the late Ananias. The sportsman was shooting crows—which, considering the general worthlessness of those black rascals, is a very worthy sport—when he noticed a flock alighting in a field near a fence. As the fence was grown to what in most Southern states most fences are grown, a good chance to approach the crows unobserved was given. The gunner negotiated the vital distance unobserved by the wary sentry perched on the top of one of the fence-row trees and silhouetted boldly against the sky. He managed to crawl so close that he did what is not often accomplished—he made a double on the wary birds. The flock, of course, rose in great confusion, cawing many distracted caws; and that these were angry as well is to be guessed from the sequel of this business.

The gunner, keeping his eye on the flying birds, noticed the so-called sentry rejoining the flock above the field. But his coming was not welcomed. Feeling themselves betrayed, the black-coated brethren had

no glad hand for the recreant sentry. They turned on him in a dusky phalanx, and, cawing harshly, they buffeted him unmercifully, trouncing him soundly for what they apparently considered his going to sleep at his post. There never was a clearer case of outright berating because of the neglect of a vital duty.

I have seen the same punishment meted out to young dogs by their elders. Once I walked up three full-antlered bucks in comparatively open woods. They rocked away in their lithe and airy fashion. I had three dogs with me, an old hound and two puppies. I brought these on the leash to the trail and let them go. They yelped away eagerly, the old dog following them with a certain bored and silent earnestness. As soon as she overtook them she tumbled them this way and that, snarled and snapped at them, and finally managed to turn them in the direction in which the deer had gone. As I am sure that she had not sighted the stags, she judged by scent that the puppies had taken the wrong end of the trail; and she had her own method of reprimanding them and of setting them in the way they should go.

But it is not of such punishments as these that I want to tell, interesting though they may be; it is rather of the sentinels that wild creatures post for their protection. This business of warders is far more common than is supposed; and a careful consideration of it cannot fail to heighten our respect for the mental capacity of the children of the woods and the waters, the mountains, the plains, and the swamps.

Some of the great hunting clubs on the southern coast have permitted me to roam their preserves for the purpose of making wild-life observations; and both because of this fact and because of the opportunities for observation that come to the average hunter, I have been enabled to give this matter of what one might call wild outposts a considerable degree of careful study; but with what results it is in the reader's equity to judge.

About four o'clock one winter afternoon I greatly enjoyed, on a wild coastal island, watching two old bucks double-team it in the sentry business. They had come out of the dense red-cedar woods to feed in the marsh. At a distance of perhaps two hundred yards I saw the antlers of one glinting in the long rays of the setting sun. Stalking them up the wind, I got within an easy fifty yards; and from behind a screen of myrtles watched the bucks feed.

The deer on this island are molested very little, yet their behaviour has apparently lost nothing of that exquisite wariness, that delicacy of attention to even the slightest sight or sound or smell, that clairvoyant alertness that is almost inseparable from genuine wild beauty.

As I was now quite close to the bucks, and as they were in full view, I could observe them minutely. For perhaps fifteen or twenty minutes, until they moved off without having observed me, they fed on the short green marsh; but never once did they relax their vigilance. When one would bow his head for a mouthful of the succulent greenery, the other, per-

haps munching thoughtfully the bunch of marsh that he had just pulled, would watch intently the dark forest whence they had come, the lone marsh before them, the long creek winding up through that solitary reed land. The alternation of the responsibility of this vigil was almost mechanical in its exactness; it was a silent, tireless watch.

But these were two old boys, wise in the perilous ways of a hunter's world. I have seen groups of younger deer feeding in concert; though even here there is usually one that stands a bit apart, and that feeds far less assiduously than the others. If a full-grown stag is present he is commonly on the alert, though on one occasion I observed a spike buck sentinelling a herd of which an old hart royal was the indubitable head. His highness was enjoying himself tremendously eating acorns!

Many observers have recorded a very peculiar yet natural habit of the Virginia deer in feeding; it is that just before lifting its head to give the haunted landscape the once-over, it will twitch its tail in a goatlike fashion. Many a feeding deer has been stalked through a hunter's watching the twitch of the deer's tail, and making himself very small as soon as this eccentric signal gave notice that the deer was about to raise its head. This flicking of the tail is no doubt a nervous symptom; for when the deer reminds itself that there may be an enemy near, and that it is high time to look about for safety's sake, the emotion of apprehension is shot along the nerves

to the tail. The inevitable flick is the result. In the summer, when the flies are bad, the waving of the tail is almost as continuous with deer as it is with a mule. But a deer's whole attitude is different. I once watched three of them standing breast-high in sweet myrtles, fighting flies. There was much tossing of sprightly heads, impatient staccato stamping of feet, constant switching of tails. Under almost any circumstances, even so ignominious a one as fighting flies, deer have a pride, a hauteur, an aristocracy of birth and of breeding that distinguishes them as among the most attractive of all wild creatures.

On several occasions on a platform built in some pine trees I have observed deer by moonlight. As far as I could tell, they did not seem to relax their vigilance. The sentinel was posted as usual. Human sentries are valuable chiefly in the daytime. Except where the cougar and the timber wolf are still found, deer have few natural enemies to fear in the darkness. But it is their nature to be alert; and not only do they remain watchful but they sidle through bushes, float airily over obstructions, and otherwise pursue their eerie silent way. On a night intensely still I have had a small herd of deer—about seven in number—approach within fifty yards of my platform ere I was aware of their presence.

I used to mount this platform at sunset, so that my scent would be dissipated before the arrival of the deer—they generally came about eleven o'clock. Sometimes I would take a negro with me. We had a strict agreement not to smoke. But one night he

ventured to take a chew. Just about that time a deer came almost under the platform. The negro had to relieve himself or else have a spasm. He managed to relieve himself with a remarkable degree of silence; the faint noise of the fall of the tobacco juice was hardly enough to alarm the deer. But he decided that the smell meant trouble. At any rate, he gave a whistling snort, wheeled, and was gone crashing away into the forest. When a deer is really running he is not careful about the amount of noise he makes.

I have often tried to discover the signs and signals given by deer to warn their fellows. Sometimes precipitate flight is evidently considered signal enough; but bucks, when alarmed, give a blowing snort, sometimes very loud, and apparently scornful and defiant and challenging; yet the subsequent attitude of the snorter does not usually indicate an excess of courage. I have noticed that when a buck, uneasy over something that he considered might be perilous, stamped sharply and impatiently, his feeding companions would look up quickly. This stamping certainly acts in a sense as a communication. With rabbits, it is a standard form of radioing. Occasionally deer will bleat timidly; there is hardly a fainter, a more pathetic sound in nature. But this note is not a warning; usually a doe is calling to her fawn or possibly to a buck. In the mating season, after a long pursuit by the buck and an equally long flight by the doe, she may suddenly turn feminine, and then call to him with demure, irresistible allurements. Once or twice only, in the heart of very wild country, I have heard

this mystic, fascinating call. Deer in captivity have forgotten this thrilling note. When they essay it they achieve nothing but a fatally civilized blat.

What was to me a very curious example of the deer's unfailing watchfulness was called to my attention one day by a negro who was driving for me. He came out to my stand on the road and asked me to go back into a pine thicket with him, as he wanted to show me a sight. He cautioned me to be very quiet. We crawled on the ground for a distance of a hundred yards or more, and there came to a dense little holly tree. Gingerly parting the low branches, my guide pointed to a sunny glade far through the pine thicket, clearly visible under the dusky boughs. In absurdly plain view were lying two great stags; and they were lying back to back, yet each lying on his left side. The head of one was near the haunch of the other; and, of course, this arrangement compelled them to face in different ways. A more perfect scheme for watching could not have been devised; and I have no doubt that it was designed.

These splendid bucks were chewing the cud, drowsing, blinking, enjoying their siesta. I do not believe that deer do much sleeping—in our sense. They rest; but it is not in their nature diurnally to become dead to the world. The observation may have no scientific value, but it has seemed to me that the carnivorous creatures as a rule require and take more profound sleep than the herbivorous. None of the ungulates is inclined to indulge in the same kind of slumber as a dog, a cat, a man.

This business of wild warders put me one day into a curious predicament, the real meaning of which it is in the reader's judgment to determine. There was a famous old bull alligator living in a cypress pond near home; and on him I had long had pernicious designs. The shores of the lagoon were heavily wooded down to the water's edge, and, as during my military manœuvres the weather was hot and dry, I could not manage to make a noiseless way through the thickets; and the moment that my intended victim heard a stick crack or leaves rustle he would sink into the dark waters from his comfortable semi-snoozing position on their surface or else would hurtle in a vast but swift reptilian wriggle from the log on which he had been sedately basking. On several occasions I had seen him take the plunge, the antithesis of the grace of a swan dive; and at other times I had heard him resoundingly strike the water after a plunge. At last it occurred to me to wade up a tiny stream that took care of the overflow from this woodland pond. I had with me a rifle for the real work of the expedition.

After hobnobbing with water snakes, and giving certain huge gaudy spiders every opportunity in the world for exploring the regions of my face and neck, I at length waded silently out of the head of the stream and into the dark waters of the pond. The water at this point took me between the knees and hips.

There was an old cypress log lying partly in the water on the farther side of the pond; and I knew this to be the couch of my old acquaintance. Because of dense groups of little cypresses growing here and

there in the lagoon, I could not at first discover the log. I waded forward. Soon I saw the royal couch, and his grim Majesty thereon. There are two vital shots for an alligator—one in the head, the other under the forearm. Because of a tree growing near the log, the big 'gator's head could not be discerned; but edging forward, I was afforded a fair view of the light-coloured patch under the huge reptile's forearm. A 'gator on land commonly sleeps with his forelegs extended like paws and the back legs drawn up rather awkwardly. I got my rifle up for a shot, and was considering how often this old saurian had eluded me—taking rather exultant aim through the peep sight—when some instinct made me turn my head. I just seemed to know that something of urgent interest to me was behind me. It was.

Between me and the mouth of the little stream up which I had waded was a second alligator, hardly inferior to the one on the log, and, because of his apparent wish to be quite intimate with me, far more impressive in appearance than his safely distant fellow. To cut the story short, I shot the one on the log, and whirled to try to greet his fellow likewise. Yet I shall never forget his cold, appraising stare. A reptile has a look that is peculiarly its own. That gaze has a lifeless, fishy quality that is repellent.

Often have I wondered whether this second 'gator was not a watchman for his sleeping comrade. Whatever his function, and whatever his design, he followed me. The alligator is usually considered to be prehistoric in his character and habits; but in one

respect I have found him to be ultra-modern: he is an investigator.

Of other wild creatures perhaps the best setters of sentries are the sheep and the goats; the members of this whole family, indeed, share the first prize for this warder business. The Siberian argali, the chamois, the ibex, the bighorn of the Rockies, and the mountain goats of the same general region; the Suleiman and the Astor markhors—all these are masters in the setting of a watch. I think honourable mention goes to the pronghorn antelope; every one of the pathetically small number now remaining has, because of tireless persecution, apparently appointed himself an individual sentry. Yet in little bands of antelopes there is invariably an official watchman.

It appears to me that in the migration of wild fowl there is likewise an official guide. When ducks and geese are in ordinary flight above waters and shores where they are staying, the leader of a flock, at the peak of the triangle or the point of the wedge, does not seem to be of particular importance. The lines break, straggle, lose their character. But birds observed flying in a migration obey strictly their book of tactics. There is apparently much importance attached to the leader. He must determine the direction of the flight, the speed, the height, and possibly the duration. Of course the responsibility is frequently shifted. Many observers have noticed how the bird at the point will, after his turn, drop back to a place on one of the wings, his leadership then being as-

sumed by one of his comrades. During one of these momentous journeys there is much conversation carried on, geese being especially loquacious. Certainly these creatures have a language of their own; and I have often wondered if their raucous clangour could not be interpreted in some such manner as this: "Hey, there, you scout in the lead, how fast do you think we can fly?"; "Give me a little more room. Stop jabbing my ribs with your left wing"; "Everybody up, now," says the leader; "yonder ahead is another range we'll have to cross"; "Oh, there's the Potomac. I remember it from last year." Perhaps much of the conversation which kills time as Pullman cars speed southward in the autumn is duplicated high in the heavens in another tongue. If geese in a migrating flight are shot at by some enthusiast with a high-power rifle, they will very quickly complain; less, perhaps, at the gunner than at their leader, who has brought them into peril with an ancient implacable enemy.

Of all the watches set by wild game that of the wild turkey is one of the very best. A turkey's senses are preternaturally keen; and since he is as sensitive to sound as he is to sight, his wariness is one of the hair-trigger variety. Often, in mountain glades, in wheat stubbles near woodlands, in rice stubble near forests of oak and of pine, I have observed wild turkeys feeding; and invariably, though apparently undisturbed, they would have a watchman out. He would usually stand on the borders of the feeding flock, a trim, alert, erect sentry, his almost serpentine

neck and head singularly rigid. This same guard or outpost is usually to be seen with a flock of turkeys travelling through the woods, sometimes two or three taking it upon themselves to act as warders.

On a good many occasions I have, in the autumn and early winter, watched wild turkeys feeding, on the open plantation lawn under live-oaks, on the sweet acorns of which these birds are excessively fond. Always there would be the warder. Not infrequently small groups of wild birds would join the tame flock, but remaining somewhat aloof. At a distance of almost two hundred yards the wild birds—of almost the same plumage as their bronze domestic brethren—could be easily distinguished by their alien air—a certain erectness of posture, a certain elegance, a certain wild glamour and grace, a certain flair of birth and breeding.

One day a negro living on an abandoned plantation adjoining mine sent his son over to tell me that two old gobblers were feeding in his peanut field. This patch I knew well; it was about two acres in extent, fenced in, bounded on three sides by dense woods and on one side by the river.

The exposure was southern, and as the situation was very solitary, the field rich in food and in soft sunny sand for the birds' washing, the place was an ideal one for a turkeys' retreat.

But it is always well to try, before taking a trip after game that a negro has described, to attempt to authenticate his story.

"Turkeys?" I asked my present dusky informant; "are you sure you don't mean turkey buzzards?"

A good-natured laugh greeted my would-be wit.

"Buzzard," the negro assured me, "can't gobble."

This was reassuring.

"Did you actually see them?" I asked.

"My eye done look on um."

That was convincing. A plantation negro sometimes has a way of using language that reminds one of certain tones in the Hebrew prophets, in Kipling, and in Julia Ward Howe.

On reaching the field some thirty minutes later, approaching it cautiously on foot through a dark sweet jungle of hollies overhung with jasmine, and literally crawling up to the fence that sagged its way through the fragrant shadows, I saw no turkeys. These two old gobblers were rather well-known characters in that section, having become the goal of at least five good hunters of my acquaintance. But they were educated eluders; and I now had a suspicion that they had given me the slip. The negro with me is distinguished by a name that, I believe, belongs to the most authentic of announcers; it is Gabriel.

"Where are they, Gabe?" I now asked him foolishly. A man must not really expect his guide to be supernatural; too prone is the hunter sometimes to lay upon his guide the burden of accounting for the eccentric—or intelligent—behaviour of wild game. Yet even in this exigency Gabriel did not fail me.

"Yonder is one," he said, pointing with a cautiously foreshortened arm and finger at a corner of the

sandy field quite near to the place where we were lying.

After close scrutiny I discerned one of the great birds standing alertly beside a little myrtle bush growing on the edge of the field. He was a huge old fellow; but he looked trim and deft. I wondered if we had alarmed the other, and if he had made off.

Easing myself a little upward, I soon discerned the other gobbler dusting himself in a sand hole against the fence. Sedately he had fluffed out his abundant and gorgeous plumage, and now lay on his side drowsily, his big legs and feet extended with comical awkwardness. I could even see his normally brilliant eye now blink drowsily.

In a few moments he righted his bulk, waked thoughtfully, rose, shook from his majestic person a dense cloud of dust, repeated this housecleaning performance, preened himself, looked about, and then walked over and took up the watch by the little myrtle bush. The other gobbler then relaxed his vigil, turned toward the sunny hole that his old comrade had abandoned, and was soon deep in his dust bath. This interesting arrangement was most evidently one for mutual protection. I believe it is not uncommon for two old males among wild creatures to consort for safety and companionship. This fraternal order, however, is invariably ruptured upon the approach of the mating season, when a mightier instinct than self-preservation makes itself master. Of course the mating instinct is closely related to the

emotion for self-preservation, for it is an instinct for the preservation of the race.

Among the humbler birds, the bobolink and the red-winged blackbird are adepts in the matter of posting warders. In the South the former becomes the rice-bird; and in the late summer he is a pest in the rice fields. A flock of twenty or thirty thousand of these birds can cause the rice planter to believe in a personal devil. In minding rice I always noticed that the flocks of these birds were carefully sentinelled by little groups of their fellows perched on willows and cypresses growing on the rice-field banks. Similarly blackbirds, grackles, vultures, starlings, and even cedar waxwings post warders. As in human warfare, the way to stalk the army is to stalk the sentry.

It seems to be true that birds and those animals which live on plains or on barren plateaus and mountains are the most indefatigable in providing watchmen. A far command of landscape, either because of the openness of the country or because of the viewer's elevation, seems to be the condition which calls for a sentry. The case is necessarily different in wooded mountains or in wooded flat country.

A last warder I mention because of a certain comic aspect that the nature of his watchfulness and his warning possesses. Everyone has to admit that bullfrogs are wise creatures, wise enough to make some men hang diminished heads. I have watched them ranged in a solemn council on the borders of a dark

lagoon, voicing as the spirit would move them, in tones of the most impressive melancholy, "unutterable things." Many of them doze; some blink prodigiously; always one or two watch; and these warders vent their feelings in certain lugubrious lyrics, as impressive in tone as the horn of Roland, rallying his ranks at Roncesvalles. But the frog's boldness is, I fear, Falstaffian; for at the first hint of danger one of these boastful sentinels is the first to jump. Nor does he take any interest in the matter of warning his snoozing comrades; he sounds no alarm other than that which his own amazing precipitancy may suggest.

XII

THE SWAMP IN SPATE

A GREAT water, she's gwine to roll." Such was the oracular announcement of Prince, my negro boatman. As Malcolm said of Edward the Confessor, of Prince it might also be said, "He hath a heavenly gift of prophecy." Likewise there has always been a native poesy about him; often it found utterance, as it did on that balmy January morning as we stood together at sunrise on the long, lonely rice-field bank. He did not tritely say that there would be a freshet; he prophesied the rolling of great waters. Prince could not read; he had not therefore seen, as I had, the "stages of water" reports in the daily paper; but he sensed that a mighty flood was coming down the Santee. Perhaps, after all, his instinct was more to be relied upon than a press report; for is not instinct ancient wisdom?

Some twelve or fourteen miles above its mouth the Santee divides into north and south branches, and ere these reach the ocean they are a mile apart. Between them is the great delta—a vast, inchoate country, with here a gloomy and mouldering swamp, there a shimmering reedy expanse; here a warm winding creek, always teeming with wild life, there brakes of

swamp blackberries and of canes so dense that little more than the swamp rabbit and the cottonmouth moccasin (those inveterate enemies, or, rather, that palpitating fugitive and that grim hoary Borgia) can insinuate their way into them. The north end of the delta is almost wholly swamp; and such a swamp as affords at every step of progress through it exciting promise of something to be discovered, exciting fulfilment of some strange hope. Here abides the nameless glamour of mystery; here is suggested the virginal, the inviolate, the alluring, the forbidding. The swamp is a mystic, the keeper of some tremendous secret. I once heard a hunter laughingly remark that if some prehistoric creature such as the brontosaurus ever came to light in the modern world it would not emerge from the dreary fastnesses of Rhodesia or of Patagonia, but from the vast and solemn recesses of the great Santee Swamp.

It is when the river is in flood that one is afforded some glimpses of the swamp. The sorceress isn't exactly disrobed for a plunge; but the risen waters give a man the chance of approach. As we are nine miles from the sea, feeling there the full effect of the salt tides which back up the freshet waters, and as the boundaries of the river country are there rather narrower than they are lower down, we get the dubious benefits of the flood's full height.

This rise in the Santee's waters is a very much worse thing than it used to be a generation ago. The merciless deforesting of many of the slopes past

which the mighty river in its long journey to the sea flows has made it possible for rainfalls to rush unchecked into the tolerant channel. Unfiltered, unabsorbed, these torrents pour into the Santee. In the old days a rise of twelve or fourteen feet in the river was deemed high; freshets lately have been coming over twenty, and one flood rose twenty-six feet. During this deluge I was watching with a negro field hand the inundating of many landmarks that had never known the touch of a freshet tide. I asked him if he didn't think there was some possible way to check its stormful advance, its proud triumph.

"Cap'n," said the old philosopher, "things like this ain't meant to be stopped."

In our region of the river country one of these spates rises for four or five days, remains almost stationary for a day or two, and then slowly recedes. The length of its stay and the height to which it rises depend on both the winds and on the tides; an east wind backs up the water, as does a spring tide such as the full moon brings. Of course these forces determine only in part a freshet's height. Because of its pent-up momentum and because of the vast suction of the sea tides the falling of the water is more rapid than its rise. The sea is an insatiable thing. I have stood on the beach on Cedar Island, which is at the tip of the delta, and have watched the ocean gulp the ramping affluence of the tawny tide. Into the blue immensity of the Atlantic the river rushed; and the great sea, inscrutable as death, received it in

silence, absorbing it miraculously, so that "the place thereof shall know it no more." But the aspect of a freshet at the river mouth is not nearly so impressive as the sight of one in the swamp. Prince and I knew this; for many a year we had seldom missed the opportunity to explore at such a time the mysteries of that shrouded domain.

"Day after to-morrow," I told him, "the water will be getting near its height. We'll leave early, and come back late. You get the boat ready; I'll attend to everything else."

Thus it was that ere sunrise on the second day following we were ready to push away from the plantation shore. The wharf at the river landing has long since been submerged. The strange yellow tide, an alien yet insistently familiar, laps against the shores. Down the pathway on the bank, now under an inch of water, clapper-rails, Wilson snipe, swamp rabbits, woodcock, and other refugees have gathered. Their presence makes me think of Burke's "Public calamity is a mighty leveller." Along the wild fringes of the river, marshes and margins of duck-oats are drowned; the alders, the shorter cane-brakes, and all the bush growths are fast being submerged. Only the taller trees stand out solitary like lighthouses. The sun of the warm mid-winter day is rising; balmy and aromatic are the airs. Behind me in the safe dry thickets towhees and parula warblers are singing. The peace of the calm day is belied by the angry aspect of the surging flood. I always feel at such a time that Nature, after completing some fell work of destruction, re-

turns to gaze upon it with a complacent and an alien eye. And such a flood is really destructive; for example, it is a heartless force, disrupting the winter sleep of myriads of hibernators. The effect of such a freshet upon their brumal ease is cataclysmic.

Having measured with a thoughtful eye the dimensions and the temper of the spate, I somehow fail to be impressed with the quality of the transportation that Prince has provided for our visit to the swamp. It is indeed a boat; but the man who made a dugout of it started wrong—he chose a cypress log too small for such a purpose. Such an error is, to say the least, fundamental. Our canoe had length, it had a certain tippy grace, it was beautifully made; but it was wasp-waisted for its full length, and over its thin sides, now as it lay innocently against the bank, aspiring little waves leaped freakishly. The craft made me think that “Don’t enter the ship” might be a better slogan than “Don’t give up the ship.” Those who are continually crying the latter to their imperilled friends are commonly standing on shore.

“Prince,” I protested, “this is the best boat to get drowned in, or from, that I ever saw.”

“When old Eli made her,” he answered, “he said he might use her for his coffin.”

Such was his warm reassurance.

But when we were once steadily seated in our frail little craft, buoyantly she rode forth on the broad bosom of the Santee. More than any other tide I know, that of a freshet has a volume and a vehemence.

It has a lawless exuberance, a spendthrift vigour. A flood is the triumph of incontinence. It seems a part of that dark power the kingdom of which is of the shadows and abides forever. As the home shores receded, the immensity of the flood widened before us. There was a brutal gladness about the freshet that reminded me of certain joyousness in boys, a jocose cruelty. Far up the glimmering river I espied a tall rack of chestnut-coloured antlers. There was a gallant buck swimming for his life out of the lonely swamp. He had probably come several miles, but the mainland was now in sight. A deer is a tireless swimmer, but I have seen more than one labour pitifully in the spate's mighty currents.

Crossing the river, we reached a hushed hiatus—a backwater full of eddies and of trash, to windward of a line of trees, to leeward of a vast cane-brake. The tan-and-green tops of the canes whispered and hissed and rustled as the tide worked nervously with the submerged stems. Against the brake was a deep and long raft of sedge. Upon it nine swamp rabbits squatted piteously. Knowing little of man, they have small fear of him; and in a flood fear of man in all wild creatures is somewhat abated, tempered as it is by the apparently graver and more immediate menace of the rising waters. More than once when these timid little fur balls of the marsh have come in freshet time to the mainland shore I have caught them with no particular effort. When caught, they cry pathetically. One of the standard sounds of this

weird delta country is the shrill wail of a captured rabbit. Many enemies has he—owls, hawks, eagles, foxes, wildcats, to mention but a few.

Through the tree-trunks that marked the line of the lost river bank we pushed our way gingerly. Here the tide hurried faster—eager, insistent, gulping trash, whirling in soft golden eddies. Though the freshet was at its height, and standing still as far as farther rise was concerned, the movement of the waters continued. Now we came to an ancient cypress, a pagoda-like tree, solemnly squatting in the water. It appeared a shrine of the occult, a place for dim and mystic rites. Against its sombre shelter we hove to, and my hand was outstretched to grasp a low-sweeping limb. But a warning cry from Prince checked me. Numbed and distorted by cold, grimly savage over their plight, three huge cottonmouth moccasins lay huddled against the bare matting of boughs that moved sighingly in the current. Here, indeed, if any adventurer felt inclined to explore the undiscovered country, were the malignant ministers for the ultimate rite. They were monstrous old brigands from the vast delta country, mud-besmeared, glaring eyed, dully furious from having been washed from their hibernating quarters by the unsparing flood. I noticed that, although their bodies were dirty and unkempt, their heads were clean. I got the impression of baleful still eyes, sardonic and watchful, contemptuous lips, massy jaws, sudden death slothfully impending.

"Prince," I said, "they look cold. Will they strike?"

My question was not addressed casually, for Prince is a good deal of an authority on snakes; he is the only man I know who has twice been struck by the cottonmouth and has lived.

"Strike?" he now repeated in incredulous irony. "Strike is the first thing and the last thing they do."

To test his words, I presented a paddle, none too gently, to one of these drowsing monsters.

Swifter than the eye could follow he had struck the soft water-soaked end of the cypress blade. Drops of yellow poison dripped into the yellow tide.

"What will become of these snakes, Prince?" I asked.

"As soon as the water falls some will crawl into bed again, but some will get washed away."

It is a fact that many of these river reptiles are carried on trash and logs out to sea, and that the sea islands near the river mouth are badly infested by them. It is also true that bathers on the summer beaches, as far as thirty miles from the mouth of the Santee, have been horrified to encounter in the surf full-grown specimens of America's most venomous reptile. It has been proved that the cottonmouth secretes more venom of a high virulence than a rattler; the diamond-back is the more deadly because of the formidable size which he often attains. A six-foot cottonmouth would probably establish a record. Such a length for the great swamp rattler is common. There is one record (from northern Alabama) of an eleven-foot rattler; another (from western Florida) of a diamond-back 11 feet 3 inches. Both

of these serpents were taken within the last ten years.

From the haunted cypress we passed to a more pleasant scene. Northward from our cane-brake a wide waste delta field had been submerged; but in one place a prodigious growth of reeds managed still to rise above the waters. There must have been five acres of nodding plumes, and from the sanctuary thus afforded there came the pleasant gossip of wild ducks. I knew from their voices that they were black ducks. As a rule, species keep together. Once I heard an old negro say that mallards had "taken a contract" for a certain preserve; and it is true that the various kinds keep segregated, especially as the winter gives hints of waning. In the South the winter is continually doing that. These black ducks before us were greatly enjoying their sunny retreat. The waters had obliterated their normal feeding grounds far down the river. At such a time I have seen countless thousands of wild fowl, "in forms and squadrons and right ranks of war," thronging northward to find temporary new feeding grounds. When flooded out of the delta, they repair to the salt-marsh creeks to the southward and to the great swamp to the northward, where indeed abundant food always awaits them. Into the sere reeds of the sanctuary our listless canoe insinuated itself lithely, parting the frail obstructions like a water snake. Immediately upon our touching the sedges five ducks jumped.

"The watchmen," said Prince.

Their cries startled others; then the flock rose. I

roughly estimated the number to be five or six hundred. All these ducks jumped in precisely the same manner. A dash downward of the wide-webbed feet, a smart striking of the wings (often on the water), and each duck would bound upward, usually to a height of about five feet. At that height the bird would look awkward and tail-heavy, feet untucked, neck bent and craned. But swiftly comes the righting, the complete recovery of poise, the gathering of graceful momentum. This method of rising seems characteristic of ducks surprised in cover, or in some place such as a deep ditch where a jump is essential to a start.

Emerging from the reeds, we saw what we took to be a black log drifting. As valuable timber is always to be had in a freshet, we pushed toward it. Cross-ties drifting seaward are easily caught and tied up with grape-vines until the water subsides. But a spate is full of surprises. Coming within a few yards of our log, we made it out to be an alligator, roused from his long sleep by this wintry flood. He was not swimming, but drifting swiftly and smoothly, his head and a little of his back showing. This nine-foot monster regarded us with infinite grimness; indeed, I think nothing in Nature has a more grim aspect than the set jaws of a bull alligator. His eyes, wide open, glared with a dull cold brilliance. Against such brutal treatment as he was undergoing he seemed to be protesting to the gods in savage silence. This bull was one of the few I have ever seen abroad in the winter, and his presence was compelled. Knowing

him as a merciless minotaur, I had it in mind to shoot him; but he appeared a helpless sort of dragon. We let Ladon sail glumly on. How far would he go? Probably he would lodge against some tree or brake, and there exist shiveringly until the subsiding of the waters. Possibly he might drift out to sea, thence to be washed back upon one of the coastal islands. I have a friend who is a gamekeeper on one of those barrier islands, and he has told me that one day, upon going down to the beach to bathe, he beheld a huge bull alligator serenely riding the breakers. An alligator apparently passes without harm from fresh to salt water, and I have known many to live in brackish creeks.

Northward now we struck toward the fastness of the gray river swamp, mysterious and mouldering, moss-hung, solitary, beauteous, forbidding. On our way we passed many refugees. Of these the rails (the soras and the little black rails) took care of themselves best. Perhaps they enjoy a freshet. They travel along sedge heaps, busily probing; they fly across strips of water to patches of bushes; they forage along old drifted logs, and dodge in and out of the sighing tops of the drowning brakes. On one small sedge strip I counted seven of these handsome birds; four others picked their way gingerly through the despairing heads of a suffocating reed bed. Their activity and apparent aplomb amid wide disaster were in curious contrast to the huddled misery of the rabbits. Nothing could be more forlorn than a tremulous bunny, soaked from a long swim, hunched dis-

consolately on the top of a stump, only too well aware that he is dangerously spectacular. Some of these swamp rabbits had climbed two or three feet high in vine-covered bushes. The birds seemed to be enjoying the frolic adventure; the rabbits, saturated with self-pity, timorous and palpitant, awaited doom. Such is temperament.

And now Prince and I have entered the fringes of the swamp. It is as if portals of mystery had ushered us in. I had the feeling that death must be like this. A silence, vast, alien, holy, portentous, brooded here. We were in some fabulous cathedral, the solemn aisles and glimmering transepts of which withdrew toward the bournes of eternity. Here the heart was instantly shot through with the sad penetration of the ephemeral nature of the life of man. For here were giant cypresses many of which had been standing these two hundred years. Man-bodied vines, the great muscadines, wreathed the cypresses fantastically. Here are giant pines, towering ninety feet to the first limb. Out of their fragrant crests a faint æolian music breathes, as if from some far-off land. Tall tupelos there are, and stately gums, with here and there a holly or a red cedar rising sixty feet above the water. I have never seen such hollies as those which grow in the swamp. They assume the cone shape of the hemlock, and when gaudily illumined with berries they look like Christmas trees for Titans. This part of the swamp, as yet untouched by man's hand, has the hush and the inviolateness of some fairy domain.

Our canoe moved easily through the flooded naves of the dim swamp. In this strange land, though as in some mighty edifice the total effect might be gloomy, there were lyric bright details. Over the tolerant bulk of a monstrous cypress base a wild jasmine disported its clambering grace. Its evergreen vine festooned the gray base of the giant tree, lowering down a tapestry starred with golden bells. Over many of the smaller trees hung mighty wreaths of smilax—verdant ropes fifty and sixty feet long, ending in a vast wreath completely crowning the unhappy victims of these effusive attentions. Here, too, were the scarlet berries of the swamp-brier, the misty purple clusters of the sweet gum, the pale, cold mystic berries of the mistletoe. On many trees hung bunches of this gorgeous parasite large enough to fill a two-bushel measure. On all these berries robins and cedar waxwings were feasting. Thousands of robins would be in sight at one time, a gay, roistering, carolling crowd. Little cared they for a freshet. The stern sweet business of home-making was far behind them and far ahead; now they were disporting themselves on the Riviera. Joyous were those migrants, spending the winter in the South and doing so without money and without price. A tourist has no such advantage.

After we had come a mile through the shadowy swamp, "The Ridge is ahead yonder," Prince reminded me. This upland of the swamp was discernible afar by the line of tall pines growing upon it. As it is seldom submerged, I knew that we were sure to find many refugees harbouring upon it.

Strange are the bedfellows made by a flood. As we drew near the Ridge, I observed many forms moving upon it. Drawing in close, we came upon a motley crowd, reminding me of the old pictures showing refugees from the Deluge. Literally they came down to the waters' brink to meet us. There were some half-wild goats; but all their wildness had deserted them. They huddled down straight for the canoe; and it was their purpose to enter it. Always in flood time certain animals recognize men as possible rescuers, or understand the safety that is supposed to abide in boats, or else feel a violent need of change. After the goats came the hogs—many of them—bristling, long-snouted, snuffing creatures, wild marauders from the swamp's gaunt heart. Yet all things considered, and despite much general opprobrium heaped upon swine, such hogs are among the most interesting refugees from a flood. They are valiant swimmers, they are fearless to the point of truculence, they are at all times self-sufficient and resolute. Short work they make of any rattlers or moccasins that lodge on the Ridge, or of anything defenseless. Roaming restlessly up and down this lone islet in a waste of spate, they are never disconsolate, futile, or timid. If food becomes scarce, a goat or a sheep will stay on the Ridge and starve; of his own initiative a hog will plunge into the flood, and for miles he will sturdily breast a tide from which many a dauntless swimmer would shrink. Grim and fierce are these tall Arabs. Some of them have ancient notches and slits in their ears, testifying to the fact that man once had a claim to



Photo by Jacob A. Dunsmuir

Courtesy of The American Museum of Natural History

AN ALLIGATOR SLIDING INTO THE WATER



them; but hogs on the Ridge are common property. Prince eyed them with especial interest. From the Ridge to Prince's little strip of land abutting the river the distance is two miles. A hog has a way of swimming straight. After many a freshet Prince has welcomed strangers from the swamp to his home. I therefore appreciated his languishing glances swine-ward.

As we moved toward the north end of the Ridge, five great forms launched themselves upward. The sun glistened upon their bronzed backs. They were wild turkeys taking flight. Powerfully off through the cypresses they beat their way. In a freshet these great birds generally take good care of themselves. Often they come to the mainland; sometimes they stay in the trees of the swamp, foraging assiduously. Occasionally young birds, caught in a region where food is scarce and unaware of the abundance of it elsewhere, become greatly emaciated. But I never knew one to die of starvation. A flood in this part of the country never stays more than a fortnight, and a wild turkey appears capable of enduring a fast of that length. As is not usually known, a wild turkey can swim well. But when I see one in flood-water I know that it is in an evil case. The tide, wetting and chilling the bird, saps its strength. A turkey will seldom deliberately take to the water; but sometimes it will begin to swim when the rising tide covers its footing. Because of its more deft and artistic poise, the hen seems a better swimmer than the gobbler.

We came to a field of small cypresses growing so close that I took hold of them on either side of the boat to help Prince get the craft through the barrage. Swimmers in the freshet tide had nearly always been in sight since we left home; but in this swamp thicket we were to see our most interesting refugee. Almost black he looked, incredibly lithe, gliding rather than swimming, sinuous, swift, radiating a certain wild intelligence. It was a big male otter—hardly, indeed, a refugee, for he was in his element. One moment only he was in sight, then he humped his glossy back, the swirl following him rising abruptly on his glistening stomach, took a header, and was gone. Motionless we sat for five minutes, hoping that he would reappear. But we saw him no more. During my roamings of the Santee Delta and its environs I have not seen many others; but they are there. They have developed the gift of effacing themselves as has the wild-cat.

Now we came to a great lane in the swamp, an apparently endless highway that Prince told me had been cut long ago by some men who had tried to take cypress out of this region. They hoped to float the logs down this corridor in freshet-time. They cut the lane before they cut the trees, and the initial cost was so great that the whole project was abandoned. The swamp, therefore, remains inviolate in a peculiar sense, for it has triumphed over a human attack.

We are now seven miles from the plantation house, in the very heart of a region of hushed secrecy. Here is a solitude like that of mid-ocean; a vast inland sea

is here, to which the waters seem native and the trees alien. Here in this glimmering abode, apparently so remote from all exterior influences, move forces from the great Piedmont country, far to the north, and from the ocean, far to the south. And here Prince and I come to see the swamp in spate—I to dream and to wonder and to be awed; he to be a companion, and perhaps to direct into homeward channels certain strayed swine. I do not know how much he senses of the vastness and mystery of this gloomy Taj Mahal but I do know that he usually sees wild life before I do, and points it out to me; and he probably has become accurately aware of the spirit of the place, for he says soon after the sun has passed the zenith:

“We must turn home now. It is all right to come into the swamp; but nobody was meant to stay here.”

XIII

WINGÉD MOUNTAINEERS

I WAS in the wildest of lone valleys. It was the mystic hour before dawn, and as I stepped out of the car, brought to a halt in the lee of a deserted barn, I was aware of myriads of splendid stars, of the long expanse of the narrow valley sparkling with frost, and of the ancient calmness of the sleeping hills. A wild moon was homing toward the haunted west. I stood in enchanted retirement, intimately sequestered by the solitary night.

Before I had slouched out of my overcoat, stripped thus for mountain climbing, I heard from a lost glen a wild greeting—or warning. Utterly savage, gloriously primeval, as elemental as the candid mountains, came the rasping bark, hacked forth negligently.

“Red fox,” I said; and it thrilled me to think that I should find one so comparatively near to civilization—for I could hear roaring away across the mountain a B. & O. freight, agonizing up a grade, blowing like a behemoth.

Weirdly, from the inviolate dusk of certain hemlocks ominously draping the creek bank, a great horned owl intoned to the fox an answer which was suitably mysterious. Far through the valley sounded

his soft and melancholy note; and if there's a sound in this world more eerie than the voice of this great night harrier, I have never heard it. Now silence fell; intense, starry, lustrous. I seemed to be in virginal Eden—a place all sparkling, glimmering, and tenderly breathed over by the hale odours of dewy pines, damp hickory leaves, and ripened fox grapes. Immense yet intimate, all the world was chill and sweet, wistful and maidenly.

Leaving my faithful car beside the dark road, I slithered down a bank on which lay a little of woods—earth and loose stones. Amiably I avalanched about thirty yards to the level of the creek. This I waded, crossed an ancient meadow, deep in natural hay, now glossy with rime, and entered the woods on the lowest slope of the mountains.

High above me, fringing the tall ridges rosily, the lights of dawn were showing. All the forest was mystically passing from the beauty of starlight to the beauty of dawn. On all sides I seemed to see faint welcomes and sad-gleaming farewells. Up an old mountain road I passed, traversed what had been a mountaineer's orchard, dipped into the hushed fragrance of a pine thicket, and emerged at the mouth of a wild sweet glen down which came stealing, with shy music made among the rocks under the drifted leaves, a tiny rill. From this point forward I walked carefully, for I knew that this was wild-turkey country. Only three hours from Baltimore, Washington, Philadelphia, or Pittsburgh I was, yet in the very heart of a region where the great American bird has

superbly reëstablished himself, to the infinite delight of every lover of wild life and to the pride and joy of the Pennsylvania sportsmen. The splendid native has returned and his reëntry into his ancient domain is one of the most enchanting stories of conversation, bordering on the romantic, and almost on the miraculous.

Four hundred yards from the pine thicket I paused in a thicket of second-growth sprouts to reconnoitre. Not far off I heard a piece of bark fall. I knew that a squirrel must have dislodged it, or else that a turkey had become restless on his roost and had kicked it loose. In the woods every sound is likely to mean something. Looking up through the trees, I saw the flaring dawn, a faint and fading star, and, assuredly, certain great black shapes in the tall oaks and chestnuts. They were turkeys, still on the roost. Counting them, I numbered fourteen; but I knew that there must be others a little farther up the glen that I could not see. In the faint fog rising from the stream, the birds looked huge. One became querulous and gave a soft call. This was the old mother. Now they began to ruffle their feathers and to crane their necks. They would soon be flying down. I stole a few yards closer, and from ambush behind a mighty poplar I watched an old gobbler go through a lazy awakening. He shifted his weight, seemed to shuffle his No. 10 shoes, thrust forth his head prodigiously, wobbled his tail to shake off the dew, and then settled back in heavy contentment.

But the younger birds were more restless. One

sailed down, and I was surprised at the little noise it made. Others joined it. Soon the whole flock was on the ground. They were so close to me that I could see every movement. They were of course foraging; but they were not yet scratching in earnest. In the leaves on the slopes of the glen the turkeys made as much noise as a troop of cavalry. A single bird seemed to make as much disturbance as a man walking carelessly. But there was a certain constant vigilance. There were alert pauses, crafty listenings, liftings of snaky blue heads in acute wariness. Once I saw an old gobbler pause while he had a great footful of leaves drawn back only half as far as he intended to pull it. He thought he detected a sound that he did not like, or else he was aware of the noise he was making. This scene was to me as arresting almost as would be one in Sherwood with Maid Marian and the others stealing through the glimmering forest.

Taking the back track, I climbed the ridge to the north of where the turkeys were feeding, intending to keep above them so as to study them better. I had gained the crest of the ridge when a weird sound literally burst over me. Comparable to the howling of a shell, it had something like wild, mad music in it. Looking up, I saw two gobblers coming. They had roosted high up on the mountain, a mile above me, and were now sailing down to feed.

This sailing of wild turkeys down the long slope of a mountain is one of the sights of Nature which affect me deeply. Launching forth on their great wings, these proud and stately birds volplane roaring down

over the tree-tops at cyclone speed. A teal duck flying on a straight stretch of river has been accurately timed as making a hundred and twenty miles an hour. Turkeys, during this superb aerial coasting manœuvre, assuredly make not less than a mile and a half a minute. These two that I saw joined the flock feeding below me.

And on what were they feeding? As the time was November, they got little animal food save a few indiscreet beetles and grubs which had either not hibernated at all or had done so in slovenly fashion. These turkeys were revelling in fox grapes, with which these particular mountain slopes were riotously draped. Ridge after ridge, mile after mile, mountain after mountain, extended this wild vineyard. Never anywhere else have I seen so many wild grapes. On these the turkeys were feeding; and on chestnuts, acorns, berries of greenbrier, teaberries, sumac, hips of wild rose, mast from the mountain pines. Indeed, this mast is a favourite food. The ruffed grouse and the turkey thrive on the same kind of food; but the turkey will, whenever occasion offers, stray into cultivated fields after gleanings of grain. When hard winter settles over the hills, the turkey will eat some buds, which then constitute the chief fare of the grouse. But throughout the winter the turkeys depend largely on what they can scratch up from beneath the dead leaves. In Pennsylvania, however, the foresters regularly feed the turkeys, as do also many sportsmen.

After watching this first flock for some hours, I

went northward along the rolling ridges, through this wild vineyard. I started a covey of six ruffed grouse—an unusual experience anywhere to-day outside of a preserve. Other turkeys I saw, several single birds, once a flock of five, again a flock of seven. From behind a stump on the sunny side of a ravine I started the red fox. I haven't decided which of us was the more surprised at seeing the other. Then two miles from where I saw the first turkeys I ran into a flock even larger. The woods were literally full of these magnificent game birds. And for fifteen miles on either side of the narrow valley this same kind of country extended. Into this region the great native has returned—perhaps not in all his original glory, but with sufficient splendour.

How has this result been obtained? Well, the sentiment in the region is favourable to the project. Game laws amount to nothing when sportsmen make up their minds to be lawless. But here sportsmen have a good association; no man hunts out of season (at least there is the strongest sentiment against it), the bag limit of one turkey a season is kept, and any infraction of the law is dealt with summarily and rigorously. The wild turkeys have come back, therefore, because the local sportsmen almost unanimously insist that they be dealt with fairly.

Again, a competent Game Department has taken care of the restocking. It has been found that for propagating purposes ordinary bronze turkey hens mate quite readily with wild gobblers; and the turkeys so reared are as wild as the most exacting sports-

man could wish. Mountaineers have told me that they have stopped trying to raise tame turkeys because just as soon as the mating time comes and the wild birds begin to call, the tame ones will literally take to the woods and will be seen no more. I remember that on our plantation in South Carolina the finest turkeys we ever had were raised from tame hens and a wild gobbler. In Pennsylvania this restocking of the mountains with turkeys has been systematic, and it has proved most effective. There is no reason why there should not be wild turkeys in every state in the Union, unless the proper sentiment cannot be created. It seems to me that in this case, as in a great many others, sentiment is our only salvation against a materialism that would ruin us. A materialist sees in a wild turkey only so many pounds of meat. This great native can return only to those regions where the materialists are in the minority.

In Pennsylvania there is a strict law against calling turkeys. I think the law should insist that everyone who hunts turkeys should call them. Everyone does, at any rate. During the season the woods are noisy with squawky boxes and squeaky bones. And these are great warnings to turkeys. The genuine calling of a turkey is really a high art, and not one hunter in a hundred can perform the feat. Besides, turkeys come to a call only after they have been scattered; at least, that rule is generally true. But at present the calling of turkeys certainly does the birds no harm, whereas it affords many an amateur woodsman a stern and

thrilling satisfaction. He can tell the family when he returns home empty-handed that he never heard his old call working better, but that somehow the birds wouldn't come. And the wise birds, while he is explaining this, will be safely roosted far back in the lonely mountains.

XIV

THE COURAGE OF THE WILD

WHAT first made me notice this wild mother was the gentle swaying of a green fern that drooped over the old trail that I was following up the slopes of the Tuscaroras. It was late in June. The air was calm. The sky had the deep halcyon blue of early summer. The mountain woods were full of wild fragrance, wild beauty, wild stillness. I had been listening for the singing of birds; but only a warbling vireo and a towhee were heard. Then I saw this fern sway. Next I heard the faintest of elfin pipings, hushed almost as soon as heard.

Stepping forward, I flushed a mother ruffed grouse, a beautiful bird; indeed, I think there is no finer in the whole world. Ordinarily, such a bird will be gone in flight far through the thicket, or will rocket over the tree-tops. Only the surest shot can kill it in the brush. But this bird was a mother. Forgotten were her dreadful fears of man; at least they were overcome by love.

The Bible, I find, knows exactly what it is talking about: "Perfect love casteth out fear." Assuredly. Here was the wildest of birds, the very essence of

timidity and wariness and intelligent elusion, about to stand me at bay. She whirled to the top of a tiny hemlock, four feet from the ground. She spread her wings, lowered her head, made curious clucking, menacing sounds. She was threatening me.

I took a step forward, knowing well that her babies were near. From the shelter of the grass, the old leaves, the ferns, they ran, shadowy little things; tiny chicks of the mountain wilderness; balls of down enclosing palpitant hearts. They vanished almost as soon as seen. My chance to see them, close as I was, decidedly was not good. As soon as the first one disclosed itself, the wild mother flew straight at my head. With curious foreshortened speed she circled me, buffeting my coat with pitiful strength—but with superb courage. A dozen times I could have reached out and caught her. Well she knew her danger. But she was willing deliberately to jeopard her life for the safety of her little ones. The true heart of the mother was there: wild, but the genuine maternal heart, ready, eager to sacrifice all for her little ones.

We rather expect this conduct from domestic things that have only a half-fear of man; and we expect it from the greater members of the animal kingdom that are often more than sufficiently strong to cope with man. But the appeal of such actions comes most sharply when we find a helpless and most sensitive mother valiantly throwing herself between death and her children.

An incident of this kind makes us ask ourselves the

The deer saw the monster coming. The stag might have weighed a hundred and fifty pounds, possibly a little more. The bull weighed nearly a ton. Yet the buck turned, lifted his proud antlered head, dipped forward his ears, opened wide his black nostrils. The bull, mumbling ferociously to himself, and not watching carefully where he was going, so busy was he with the matter of creating a dread impression, came within twenty feet of the buck ere he saw that a champion was in his path.

To see two antagonists of this sort face each other seemed almost pitiful; like pitting a baby against a brontosaurus. But the bull halted, ceased his bellowing, lifted his head high, and looked thunder and lightning at the beautiful lithe gentleman in his path-way. The crippled doe, meanwhile, had taken advantage of the diversion created for her, and was a good way off in the marsh. The bull took a step forward. I saw the buck foreshorten his neck so that it bulged, and his antlers were lowered artfully so that the tips of their keen points looked straight into the bull's eyes. Thus they stood for several moments, the stag refusing to give an inch, the bull uncertain of the etiquette of the situation.

After a time, the buck standing steadfast, the bull lowered his head and pretended to browse, whereat the deer turned and with quiet dignity followed his comrades. Once or twice he looked back. But the bull made no pretense of pursuit. He evidently found the succulent grasses more to his liking than the promise of an encounter with a buck that appeared

quite ready to take care of himself and of those under his protection.

That the deer may become, under certain circumstances, almost absurdly courageous, may be attested by the following story:

One day I stopped to see Peter Lincoln, one of my boyhood friends, who lived on a fine old place on the highway between Georgetown and Charleston, South Carolina. His yard was most ample, two or three acres in extent, with here and there a huge live-oak or a scuppernong vine. As I went in the gate, a full-grown doe jumped up from beneath an oak and came stepping toward me, her attitude clearly indicating that she doubted my right to enter the yard. When a deer means trouble, it has a very peculiar walk and an eccentric way of lowering its head and of making its hair stand out, so that its size is very apparently increased. When an animal is menacing, the Pennsylvania Germans say, "It makes ugly at me." The description is a good one.

About this time my friend appeared, and together we went toward the house, closely followed by the doe, which seemed to have lost her enmity but to have retained her curiosity. Seated before the fire inside, Lincoln told me about the deer.

"That's my watch dog," he said. "Nothing comes into this yard without her knowing the reason why. And she's always awake at night. I raised her from a fawn, and she can't be persuaded to leave the yard. I have had her out; but the minute she's on the other side of the fence, her whole nature changes. She's

just a deer once again, flighty and timid. But in the yard she's not afraid of anything.

"She always investigates visitors. A dog can't cross the fence without her being on his back. The other morning, about daylight, I heard a dog yelping. Looking out of the window, I saw the doe by the fence, jumping on something. By the time I had on my clothes, the business was over. But I am satisfied that a stray dog had tried to come through a wide panel in the fence, and that the deer caught him and mauled him before he could get away. I found signs of the struggle.

"Her scent is so keen that she knows long before I do that something is coming. She's both a barometer and a watch dog. Often I see her winding something; and after a time it will come into sight. The other day she ran some razorbacks out of the yard, and that's more than some dogs can do."

This incident, authentic in every detail, appears to me to prove that, given anything like a fair chance, a wild creature can not only show courage of a rather high order but can also develop it rapidly. Wild things, as this tale of the doe illustrates, have a deep love of a certain place; possibly a certain sense of possession (that in us is acutely developed). They will not only defend their own lives but also their own rights and property. I know with what amusement I have watched a mocking bird make everything in feathers stay clear of his castle.

As long as I can remember, a mocking bird has had

his home in a cedar, covered with smilax, close to our front porch. Of course this has not been the same bird, for generations come and go with the years, but always there has been one there with a strongly developed family trait. It is exclusiveness. This mocker is really an artist, a great solitary. Things that merely twitter and cheep and caw drive his esthetic spirit to distraction. He lurks in the shadow of the cedar most of the time. When he appears, it is either to sing divinely, or else, with the harshest cries, to drive away intruders who would profane his sanctuary.

It does not appear to matter to him what disturbs him; he protests just the same. I have seen him chase blue jays, dogs, brown thrashers, cats, crows, and even a little hawk! One day a mule sidled up to the cedar to rub off the flies; then, feeling relief in its inmost soul, it began to bray with amiable idiocy. Out of the tree flashed the mocking bird, straight at the mule's head, buffeted its ears, screamed harshly at it, and then darted with defiant grace back into the secreting shadows. I suppose we have no right to expect an artist to listen placidly to a mule's braying—and right in the studio, too, as it were.

Than the mocking bird there are others even more dauntless; indeed, one of the standard sights every summer afforded to watchers of the sky is the David-and-Goliath encounter of the kingbird and some huge antagonist—crow, hawk, buzzard, or black vulture. I have been told by a reliable observer that he has seen the kingbird put the bald eagle to ignominious flight!

But I remember seeing one day something that impressed me with the eagle's spirit. I was a few miles from the tip of the Santee Delta, in a huge wasteland. A storm was rolling up from the southwest—not an ordinary storm, but the “lunatic fringe” of a West Indian cyclone. The inky sky took on a greenish tinge, then an angry saffron. A greenish-yellow sky usually portends disaster of some kind. Things looked so bad that I decided to spend the night where I was rather than risk the wrath of the river. Yet I wanted much to be at home. I looked at my small boat; then at the stormy and menacing sky; then at the distant mainland. I was afraid to take the risk, with the twilight falling and a wild tempest lording it over the world.

But as I looked for a last time at the crazy sky, I saw a bald eagle, that doubtless had been cruising far up the river all the day long, making his way back to his roosting tree on Cedar Island, at the very point of the delta. There was grandeur in the way he rode the storm. He was heading for home; the hurricane had intercepted him. Yet he would not turn back.

It is a common sight to see birds fleeing before a storm; but here was one beating his way powerfully and heroically through the very heart of a gale. The old bird wanted to get home—just as I did. “But,” you say, “he had the advantage; he had wings.” Yes; and he had something more, to make him plunge dauntlessly toward that green-bosomed storm: he had a great heart; a certain elemental valour which we

should do well oftener to associate with these children of the wild. They are no cowards; we have no right to adjudge them so by considering merely their attitude toward us, entrenched as we are with weapons of destruction. If stags carried high-powered rifles and hunters were weaponless, I imagine that the popularity of deer hunting as a sport would wane somewhat.

Among my acquaintances of the wildwoods none was more ferocious-looking or more interesting than a gigantic razorback sow that wore a tinkling bell. Just who decorated this grim chimera with this absurd appendage is beyond me; certainly it was as incongruous as a pearl pendant on a rhinoceros. Nor did the bell have the effect of domesticating the rugged old giantess. Frequently, while deer hunting in the wildest swamps near home, I used to hear this eerie bell; and although my negro driver knew that the hog wore it, he had apprehensions about it. On one occasion, while trying to suckle nine pigs, and when both she and the pigs were famished, she came to the plantation fields. I heard the bell, then a great outcry among the sheep. Running over to where they were bleating foolishly, I saw the sow making off with a lamb in her mouth. I ran her down and made her drop it. But her boldness and her savagery impressed me; indeed, her attitude toward me was anything but conciliatory. Even after I had the lamb in my arms, she followed me truculently, champing her jaws. Tall, lank, starving, she was a really dangerous wild

creature; and the tinkle of the dainty bell only heightened the horror of her.

It was this same razorback, however, that my negro hunter saw held at bay by another wild thing, which has the reputation of being timid. He was out in the turpentine woods in mid-May, when one is likely at any time to come upon a baby fawn. But he did not see the fawn first. He heard the old sow's bell. As he was alone, as it was late in the afternoon, and as he had a somewhat respectful attitude toward "hants," he walked up the wreckage of a pine that had been thrown down by a storm. From this point of vantage he saw what he later reported to me. I shall give the story in my own words, for you would not be able to interpret his low-country speech—a language in which many native African words survive; for example, *bofemba* is rabbit, *machinchie* is small, *bungiewala* is dragonfly, and *jubrocroo* is thicket. "I saw the old sow," he said, "coming down the side of a little watercourse, and she did not seem to have anything on her mind. She was just grunting and moving along. When near me she stopped, but not because she saw me.

"Just then I saw something suddenly jump up in front of her. It was a doe. She did not run off, but turned to face the razorback. I did not know then that she had a little fawn lying there by her. The deer lowered her head, looked at the sow, and advanced toward her, stepping high, and now and then pawing. She tried to make herself look like an angry bull.

"In the wild forest deer and hogs usually pay no attention to each other; but here was a doe telling a famished old razorback to keep her distance. By this time the sow saw the fawn. It was so little that she could easily have caught it and carried it away, just as she had caught that lamb; and perhaps in a fight between the doe and the razorback, the doe might get the worst of it. But the doe put on the airs of a bully, advanced to meet the sow, and brought that old hog to a halt. The two stood facing each other. The doe curled back her upper lip, and one front leg she raised, poising it ready for a swift blow. She looked so strange, so really dangerous, that the wild hog backed away, turned, and went grumbling off through the woods.

"Then I went over to where the fawn was lying. It was so young that it could hardly stand when it got up."

Here, then, was a case of one animal's meeting another under circumstances that promised a bloody encounter. Yet a very real and spirited display of courage averted a tragedy.

I do not believe that the normal combats during the season of mating indicate any especial courage. They fight then because of natural rivalry and because of a certain impelling lustihood. Having watched a good many of these combats, I have come to believe that these wild creatures get as much enjoyment and thrill out of such encounters as knights of the olden days received from unhorsing their opponents in the lists. Wild gobblers fight readily and ferociously;

bucks resort to physical combat to test their supremacy; indeed, most males are, at times, fighters.

These encounters, however, are often little more than games; athletic contests, relished by the players themselves. Seldom do they end fatally, save by accident, as when stags get their horns locked. We have to look to other sources to find true courage. In essential courage, in true moral intrepidity, as far as my observation extends, the female is far superior to the male.

I have long wondered whether the maternal instinct, which is essentially sacrificial, does not carry with it a quality of spiritual fibre that is peculiar to feminine nature. I realize that I am on the borders of a shadowy land when I begin to talk of things spiritual; yet all of us are aware that motherhood has in it an element of divinity. The mother not only lays hold on immortality through the bearing of her child, but without the peculiarly superb quality of her devotion no species could survive.

In wild life, at least, males spend most of their time idling, sleeping, bullying, drowsing; their mates seem modest, industrious, invariably occupied with the preservation of the young. I recall how much impressed I was one spring day with the behaviour of a wild turkey hen whose nest I had located in a tangle of greenery not far from the plantation house.

From the time when she begins to look about for a suitable nesting place until her young are fully reared, the female wild turkey lives apart from the male; she

assumes the entire undertaking of hatching and rearing the young. It may sound simple; yet, by day and night, as she sits on her eggs, she has to overcome the fear of fox and weasel, prowling wildcat and roaming razorback.

Turkeys naturally roost in trees, and usually rather high up. This wild mother has to master the dread of sleeping on the ground, though the fall of night brings the deadliest dangers near. For nearly a month she resolutely stays on her nest, leaving for just a few moments a day. Then, when the young arrive, they have to be shielded, fought for, guided through wild woods, where a hundred dangers lurk. I think it takes courage to do all this.

On the day to which I referred, I went into the tangle of wild grapes and sweet myrtle to take a look at the turkey. There she sat, beside the old pine log, her beady black eyes fixed on mine. She had heard me and seen me first. If there is anything a turkey fears, it is a man, I'm sorry to report. I decided to go as close as I could, to test the wild mother's courage. For what else could it be—this desperate loyalty in the face of sudden death? To the end of the log I came; closer; now to the very last myrtle bush, under the canopy of which the beautiful bird sat. I could have reached down and touched her. Here was a pitch of steadfastness not often to be found save in some manner associated with motherhood. Here was faithfulness unto death. Here was that greater love that is willing to lay down its life for another.

This observation seemed to me to manifest true

courage, very different, I think, from that savagery that we associate with predatory things. In general, the beasts of prey attack only their physically inferior fellow-creatures. If there be courage at all in these encounters, it is generally shown by the attacked rather than by the attacker; and sometimes, as the saying goes, "the porter wakes up the wrong passenger."

On a wild island near home I was once a witness of a case of this kind—when the would-be slayer was compelled to shift its mental attitude completely. I was ranging the desolate tract looking for some strayed cattle that, attracted by the fast-springing green on the wet island, had swum the creek. I was on an old bank, with a wide canal on either side, two dim waterways in which dwelt many curious and obscure creatures, among them fish of several kinds, serpents, alligators, and frogs. From the dense woods on the island all kinds of wild things came down to this water to drink. The day was warm and springlike. Certain moccasins I saw basking in the sun, huge reptiles of repellent aspect.

Down a log that ran from a clump of trees to the brink of one of the canals, I saw a gray squirrel coming; gently, with fluffy tail arched, almost dancing its way down to the water. On the end of the log, in a depression made by the rotting away of a sappy spot, a moccasin lay. It was the largest I had seen. Toward it the squirrel advanced, unaware. Neither wild thing saw me.

The squirrel was within the snake's reach in a

moment. Savagely the great reptile struck, but the lithe squirrel leaped like lightning. So swift was his leap that he did not heed the matter of direction. In short, to avoid being struck, the gray nymph of the woods jumped over the huge moccasin, landing on the tip of the log beyond the place where the grim way-layer sprawled.

Then the squirrel was in an evil case. Beyond him lay deep water; on either side of the log the mud was soft and miry. What would he do? The snake had turned now toward him, and I did not see much chance for the squirrel's escape. But that brave and artful creature seemed self-possessed. He gave a few chatters of defiance, then darted down, ran along the *side* of the log, over which hung part of the snake's body. In passing the enemy, the squirrel gave it a sharp bite, and in an instant was scampering away down the top of the log, and so into the haven of the woods. The snake, lashing itself furiously because of the pain, dropped to the mud, and began to crawl toward the water. I saw the wound that had been inflicted. The squirrel's behaviour under the circumstances appeared to me nervy, interesting, and wise; and his adroit turning on his hideous enemy pleased me, because it showed me that the professional killer sometimes tackles a veritable tartar.

Animals will sometimes do things which may appear incredibly heroic; yet upon close examination it will be seen that they were acting merely from hereditary deep impulses, more or less automatic. But there

is no difficulty in bringing ample proof of the dauntlessness of the children of the wild. Perhaps the experience that Ned Fort had with a black bear will illustrate our point.

Fort is a woodsman of the best Daniel Boone variety; he was born, and has lived all his life, in a wild, romantic swamp that has been misnamed Hell Hole. In truth, it is one of the loveliest spots in America; for it has the glamour of the South, the freshness of primeval forests, the luring charm of remoteness and virginity. It is a region where there is much more wild life than human life.

There Ned Fort roams at will the woods that are to him home; and there he has had many a strange experience with wild animals. He told me this one night when I was with a party of hunters bivouacked on the borders of Hell Hole. That it is true down to the minutest detail I have not the slightest doubt. I know Ned; and his speech is the language of truth.

"I started this bear," he told us, "when we were deer hunting, and I shot at it. It seemed to be wounded, and I followed it on my horse. I had two dogs with me, and they kept the trail. At last the vines and bushes got so thick that I had to leave my horse and follow on foot.

"The bear had run into the last and thickest place in the whole swamp. He didn't want to go on, for beyond this place the woods began to open again. He decided that he wanted to stay right here. The dogs went in ahead of me; but they concluded they didn't want to stay at all. They were young dogs, and I

didn't blame them. They looked to me as if they had seen something they would remember for a long time.

"I decided to go in after the bear. The vines grew over the tops of the little trees, forming a heavy canopy. I had to go under; then I found that I couldn't get through. I had to do so much climbing and fighting with the brush that I decided to leave my gun and reconnoitre without it. Fifty yards from where I had left it, I came to a little opening under the roofing vines, and on the far side of this, reared up against a big tupelo, was the bear, facing me—just waiting for me, daring me to come. I figured that this place was a sort of a den; and when the bear got to it, his courage rose.

"I have seen a good many wild creatures at bay, but this one did not seem at bay. He seemed ready to fight, not because he could go no farther, not because he was wounded, but because he felt that now he had managed to make the odds less heavy against him. As far as I could tell, he was not wounded. I thought he would break away and run as soon as he saw me. Instead, he dropped to four feet, growled, and took a step toward me. I left that place in a hurry, and without being careful to follow the route I had come. I lost my gun, I lost my dogs. Behind me in the thicket I could hear the bear growling to himself.

"My dogs were at home when I got there, and they were hiding far back under the porch, too; and it was the next day before I got my gun. Sure I think a bear has courage, and of a fine sort. Let him pick his place to fight, and he will show you."

Long ago, hunting on the property now owned by the famous Santee Club, my pack of hounds, eleven in number, started a wildcat—a savage old brigand. He was jumped far from his wilderness haunts, having, I suppose, prowled farther than usual the night before. An uncle of mine was with me, and together we followed the hounds and the fleeing marauder. He came to bay in front of the armchair roots of a massive cypress on the swamp edge. The tree sheltered his back, and the roots covered his sides.

I think I never saw a more savage creature; nor had those hounds ever met so warm a reception. Most of them that rushed in gladly and tumultuously got the jarring of their lives. The wildcat worked like a whiplash; and by the time we arrived on the scene, most of the dogs had lost interest. Some were sitting down soberly, some were licking wounds, some were barking valiantly, but at a discreet distance.

My uncle walked in, to encourage the dogs; but the cat, apparently no whit dismayed by the approach of more formidable enemies, took a lithe run along the ground that was like a spring and yet was not, struck out savagely with the right forepaw, caught my uncle's boot at the top, and ripped it down to the instep. Then the cat returned to his coign of vantage in sullen triumph, the dogs opening a lane for him to pass. I think it takes courage, even though it be of a vindictive order, to face enemies of the deadliest sort with such cool intrepidity. I do not like wildcats; they are destructive and treacherous. But with my own

eyes I have seen them display a courage that one has to grant is admirable.

The fortitude that a wild creature may show in danger can seldom be told by that creature's apparent temperament and manner of life. True courage, whether in man or beast, is a matter of spirit, and as such is not necessarily related to brawn. The otter, for example, one of the shyest, mildest, and most playful of animals, is, for its size, a most formidable fighter. Henry Mills, formerly a gamekeeper at the Santee Club, told me that one of the club's finest hounds had been drowned by an otter.

Nor is this difficult to credit, for anyone who has observed an otter closely will recall this graceful creature's litheness, its sinuous strength, its agility, and the clean perfection of its muscular development. It is said, and I believe it, that an otter is a match for any other wild thing its size. Called upon to fight, it will show the most pertinacious courage; yet most of its time it spends in catching fish and in playing. Indeed, it is one of the few animals in which the actual play-instinct is highly developed.

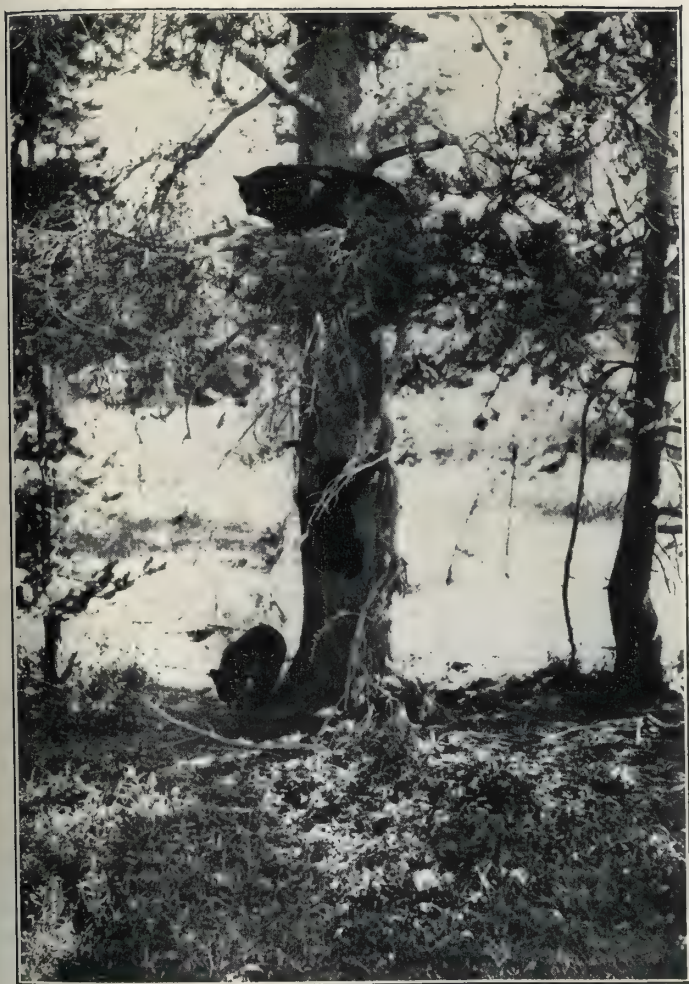
Unless my observations are inaccurate, or unless from them I am drawing faulty conclusions, I believe that the raccoon is possessed of a superior order of courage. You can look at a raccoon and see that he is not born a fighter. He is a thinker, a dreamer, a philosopher. Existence bores him sometimes. Nor is he physically equipped ably to defend himself. Yet he

can show fine courage—not a blind fighting instinct, but a somewhat demure intellectual defence.

Late one afternoon I was out walking with two bird dogs on a swamp edge near home when a raccoon ran across our path. It was early for him to be out, but there he was, as big as life. The dogs gave excited chase. In his characteristic fashion, the 'coon did not incontinently flee, but appeared to be following tactics that he was thinking out as he was escaping.

There was a narrow stream ahead of us, across which an old log had been thrown. Up the end of this the 'coon scrambled, and I thought, of course, that he would cross it and disappear in the swamp beyond. But he had a plan of his own. Halfway down the log he stopped, turned, and waited. As soon as the two dogs, noisy and excited, were on the log, slithering to keep their footing, the 'coon, to my surprise, made a short rush at them, actually swarming into the first dog. The dog yelped with surprise, lost his footing, and fell into the water. The other dog, seeing the fate of his comrade, decided that they had tackled the wrong animal. He took one look at the 'coon, that most ludicrously was making himself appear formidable, felt one foot slip, turned, and ran! Here was the old 'coon, master of the log; and below him were the dishevelled and discomfited dogs, taking it all out in barking.

If the raccoon had showed nothing but arrant fear, he would have run on, and the dogs would have caught him. He kept cool—and that's a sign of cour-



Courtesy of Eastman Kodak Company

BEARS AT PLAY

age. He attacked, and that's another sign. What he did not have of strength and ferocity, he put on; and that shows a certain readiness of nerve.

As long as I have watched wild things, I have not discovered in them what we call "the yellow streak." Some are crafty, skulking, treacherous; but, from the smallest to the greatest, corner one, and you will see manifested that back-to-the-wall courage that all of us can appreciate, even though we may recognize it as futile. I do not find that wild things lie down and give up. The Old Guard is by no means the only thing that dies but does not surrender. That proud description is shared by the hosts of the wastelands. It is quite true that many wild things will not fight until they have to fight; but what of that? The great point to be remembered is that they will not give up without a fight. Only the other day I picked up a tiny titmouse that had had its wing injured. It attacked my hand as valorously as Jack went after the Giant. This kind of courage is not belittled by calling it the valour of despair. It is real; it is genuine manifestation of spirit. It is not only the badgered lion and the wounded elephant that will charge. Even a butterfly will bite its tormentor. I like this trait of not giving up. Wild things have it.

XV

RIDING "THE OCEAN"

MY INTRODUCTION to "the Ocean," as we called that weird inviolate region, had in it the quality of the dramatic. As a bare-headed and barefooted boy, riding a little marsh tacky horse on a deer hunt, I had started a great ten-point stag. The hounds went mad on his trail. My age was nine; but I was old enough to know that the buck was not running toward the standers. I therefore undertook to cut him off and to turn him. My mount, being by nature a limb of irresponsibility grafted on a stock of wildness, obeyed my frantic injunctions, and "southward aye we fled." A mile we raced in this reckless fashion, through bushes and water, over fallen timber, and past huge swamp briers which took toll of my shirt. Just as it appeared to me that I was about to head off the splendid deer, a rider suddenly headed me off. He rushed his black mare into my path and, checking her, held up his hand to me. Such was my respect for Henry Snyder, this negro woodsman and our foreman on the plantation, that I pulled in my pony willingly enough. The stag and the hounds meanwhile had vanished into a vast

shimmering stretch of woods, and the wild clamour of the chase was strangely hushed.

Henry smiled at me deprecatingly, with a gentle understanding and a sympathetic appreciation of my savage effort that were a part of his fine nature.

"You mustn't try to go in there," he said; "that's the Ocean."

"But the deer went in, and the dogs," I protested.

"Yes," he admitted, "but the hounds won't go far, and people mustn't go at all."

Thus early in my life was characterized for me as mysterious this eerie and forbidding place. And as the years passed I came partly to understand the reason for the current woodland saying in that part of the coastal Carolina country: "There's no use to try to follow that deer; he's gone to the Ocean." Yet somewhere in my mind, in that place where we register ambitions, I had recorded the determination some day to explore this mystery, despite the fact that those woodsmen to whom I talked seemed not to share my enthusiasm for the adventure. There were several reasons for their rather definite aversion.

The first was that no man, as far as could be discovered, from the very early settlements in that district by the English and the Huguenots in the seventeenth century, had ever penetrated the Ocean. Again, it had frequently happened that a hound had never emerged from the pursuit of a deer into that treeless swamp. I say "treeless" because at its enchanted borders all natural growth appears to cease; the undergrowth becomes tropically riotous, while

the few pines and other trees are strangely dwarfed. This forbidding, or at least mysterious, aspect of the place has doubtless kept intruders at a distance. Again, there are many legends of quicksands in the Ocean; and these meet with a ready acceptance because, some two miles from the eastern boundary, along the stream which partly drains it, there is a well-known bed of quicksand, into which a few years ago a horse and buggy went down fatally. But the vague sorcery of the place is probably less of a deterrent to exploration than the fact that it is not thoroughly drained; in short, true to its name, the Ocean is usually full of water. To enter it in summer, when it might be comparatively dry, would be to expose one's self to black swarms of flies and mosquitoes from the air and to the timber rattler and the great diamond-back from the ground; besides, in the summer even the deer's dim pathways are choked by a mass of greenery. In the winter the rains usually keep the Ocean flooded. Yet a recent autumn drought, extending itself into December, brought me the opportunity for which I had waited—well, for more years than a woman ever gets to be old.

Three miles from the plantation house I turned my horse from the perfectly good road and headed toward the forbidden country. This was almost the exact route that, years before, I had taken to forestall the buck's escape. My marsh tackey was gone, and Henry, the stag, and the hounds—all had vanished into a region which would yield nothing in mystery to the Ocean. It and I remained; but it was permanent.

And now as across the pineland its ancient enchanting vistas once more came into view, I wondered if it had ever changed, or ever would. Always there is something about the quality of permanence that impels respect; and when the permanence is lasting beauty it exacts reverence and obeisance. Here for century upon century this great tract of wild woodland had retained all the primeval mystery and charm of its virginity. And the quality of that charm has in it all the witchery of those attractions which are distinctly feminine. It is in Nature an "unravished bride of quietness." Its supernal spirit, if I catch it aright, is distinctly that of Swinburne's Proserpine:

Pale, beyond porch and portal,
Crowned with calm leaves she stands,
Who gathers all things mortal
With cold immortal hands.

My approach to the Ocean brought me to the northern fringe of it. Its dimensions (by my estimate, not by measurement) are somewhat as follows: length, five miles; width, three miles. Well-travelled roads pass on either side of it, but in neither case does the swamp border the road; here and there little estuaries of greenery will extend to the highway, but the great tide of the Ocean is well withdrawn from these routes of travel.

Mention has been made of the feminine charm of the Ocean, and when I say that nothing is more deceptive than the inviting appearance of this eerie country, these two statements are not supposed to have any deep and daring implication. Gently and

fragrantly the pine wood melts into the tender margins of Circe's domain. The earth underfoot is firm white and black sand; scores of animal paths lead through the undergrowth of bays, myrtles, gallberries, huckleberries. A rainy fragrance is brushed from the glimmering foliage. Sunshine which expresses the rapture of deep-hearted peace steeps the scene. Afar it is shed over the shimmering copses before me. For two hundred yards I ride into this mystic still country, feeling indeed its witchery, feeling that I am deliberately submitting to enchantment, but having no reason to doubt or to fear—unless my horse's growing nervousness may be taken to indicate coming trouble. I notice that my mount trembles; and when I draw her in she stamps petulantly. She snorts nervously. A horse is aware of strange country; and in this case perhaps my mount has winded a black bear, a diamond-back, or some nameless chimera of this forbidden land.

Not long was I to be lulled by the exotic beauty of the scene into believing it secure or genuine. We were following a deer path through the myrtles that brushed my stirrups. Suddenly my horse stopped on the edge of what looked like a black pool of moderate proportions. Upon being urged forward, it crouched, trembling, and then bounded high over the black water. Such behaviour called for an investigation. Dismounting, and tying the horse, I examined the ebon pit over which we had just so blithely soared. From its appearance I knew it at once to be an alligator den. Here, certainly, was one reason why many

a fine hound had never emerged from his rash adventuring into the Ocean. Cutting a limb from a tree-bay, I began to probe the hole and to examine its edges. My horse punctuated my detective work with a good deal of fidgeting and nervous nipping of the bushes.

The pool was still, but not glassy. To find fresh water at the height of such a drought was sure proof that a deep spring lay somewhere beneath this black opening. The sides of this witches' cauldron were smooth, dark, sandy loam. There were many tracks on the margins. Into the mystic water I thrust my pole. It went down about nine feet, but I was sure that it had not reached the real bottom. A little manœuvring showed me that there was a curve in the deep subterranean passage. There, no doubt, was the den of this wildwood minotaur.

The den of the alligator has never been carefully explored; but it is usually located in an offset from some watery entrance. I have seen alligators take their prey and plunge downward with it; and the woodland belief prevails that the creature so caught will be borne to the grim saurian's den, where several meals at leisure can be enjoyed. From such haunts, properly situated under banks, ancient cypresses, and the like, alligators can be drawn with a long pole with a sharp hook attached. The Bible question, therefore, "Canst thou draw out leviathan with a hook?" can be answered in the affirmative.

Such an alligator's home as I had found on the borders of the Ocean represents a very interesting type of the dwelling of a wild solitary. Here and there

in the Southern woods are ponds and streams, and most of these have in them a few alligators. The hole I found was in the dry bed of a watercourse, and probably it had been one of the stream's sources but was not sterile through drought. When prolonged dry weather occurs in the summer or autumn, these wood-dwelling alligators will crawl miles to reach the river. I once came upon one at least two miles from the river. Such a truly aquatic creature so far from water has a most decidedly high-and-dry appearance. He will, if menaced, rise abruptly and with vast gaucherie on his short legs, and will waddle ferociously toward his tormentor, his jaws open, his back arched high, the tip of his tail trailing the earth. But this reptile was not built for charging. He may rush forward awkwardly for ten or fifteen feet, his aspect terrible and grim. But then he will glumly subside, his jaws closing with a vast suspired hiss, much like a tumultuous sigh. For all his strength and courage, he is pretty helpless. He is a giant, but he is out of his element.

The alligator in the black hole which I was probing was doubtless hibernating, though on this line of hibernation these creatures by no means drowse the winter through—at least not every winter. During some winters they will be plunged into that coma whence Persephone alone can awake them. Again, they may go to sleep, and in January an amorous day will bring them forth. To observe wild life on the line of hibernation is continually to be astonished. Whether this alligator on the border of the Ocean had hibernated or whether he had crawled away in search

of deeper water I could not know. But from the behaviour of my horse I had reason to believe that he was at home, and that my mount had had his musky scent.

In the saddle once more, I left the gleaming borders of my enchanted land and rode straight for the Ocean's heart. Perhaps three hundred yards I went; then I drew rein as a great bird launched himself from the crest of a pine and sailed, on a long, long arc, to the ground. A moment later and another wild turkey got up out of the bushes, literally under my horse's nose. He beat his way off heavily. It seems hard for a wild turkey to get a start in the air; but when he has gathered momentum no bird is more swift and dextrous. Possibly a fox or a wildcat had driven the first turkey into the pine; possibly he had heard my coming and had gone aloft to reconnoitre.

A half mile from the alligator hole I began to encounter real difficulty. Here the bushes were of a disconcerting height. Mounted though I was, their baffling tender maze of odorous leaves took me about the eyes. I had a smothered, drowning feeling. Here and there a great man-bodied vine, swamp brier or supplejack, would lay no uncertain hands on my horse and on me. There is no use wrestling with a vine like that. It has either to be cut through or evaded. A few attempts at evasion had the effect of confusing my sense of direction. And all about me was a silently rolling sea of aromatic foliage, glamorous, cloistered, endlessly retiring. Beneath me there was a labyrinth of witching trails, leading over damp sand—an ob-

scure region, luminous in the green night of the shadows of tropical foliage. I began to feel that my friends were right when they advised me not to attempt to penetrate the Ocean. And my horse was very certain that they had been right. This feeling for both of us was intensified upon our coming abruptly to a strange body of water, the oddest I ever encountered, even in a region where eerie ponds and weird lagoons are common features of the landscape.

This body of water was a creek or a small river, densely overhung by riotous growths, many of which had ancient gnarled forms which stooped as if in eternal agony over the alchemic ruby-red water that I saw gleaming far below the banks. The banks broke sheerly for eight or nine feet; the width of the creek was perhaps ten feet; the water in it, where I tested it, was five feet deep. Deep red it was, and apparently rich or heavy in its character. The colour, I knew, was due to the staining of the leaves and the roots. Slow was its current, as listless as Lethe's; yet where a miniature barrier of twigs formed a waterfall faint elfin music rose. For this examination I had of course slipped to the ground. My horse and I were under the green canopy of the Ocean; and I had the sensation of a diver in this beryl country under the lonely foam.

The stream flowed north and south, and it appeared an effective barrier to my going farther. Apparently it came from the heart of the Ocean; its outlet I could not guess, though I knew all the neighbouring streams. There could be no doubt but that this water

would eventually mingle with the common yellow tide of the Santee, though perhaps by some underground channel. Tying my horse to a heavy bay tree, the side of which, I noticed, had had a deep groove scored into it by a buck in rubbing the velvet from his antlers, I began to explore the stream for a ford. At several places I could see where deer had leaped, and a raccoon's track had passed on the sand down the edge of the rosy water. But there was no visible crossing for a horse and a man. An hour's search up and down confirmed my judgment in this. I therefore tied my horse with a double half-hitch, affixed my handkerchief to a long stick, which in turn I bound to the bay tree, so that the thing would be as a signal to me from afar, and ventured to strike alone on foot forward into the Ocean. In leaving the matter of the creek I may say that I never found either its source or its mouth; and old woodsmen to whom I afterward talked told me that they never knew there was such a body of water in the Ocean.

A quarter of a mile from where my horse was tied, some of which distance I had covered on hands and knees, I came to something like a ridge. This rose gently. It was underbedded with white sand. Here grew huckleberry bushes in profusion. Here, too, were thousands of deer tracks; and many washing places of wild turkeys I found in the warm sand to the leeward of thick tufts of bushes. East and west the ridge extended, and as far as I could see the red-tinged huckleberries grew. Thirty feet was the width of the ridge; on either side shimmered the lush greenery of

the ancient fastness. Mile after mile it extended—a haunt of silence, of sapphire strangeness, of something akin to sorcery. I decided to follow the ridge northward. If bushes do not grow above a man's waist he can keep his self-respect in wild country. What delighted me, on what I was pleased to christen Buck Ridge, was the abundance of the signs of wild life everywhere visible. I gathered and tied together with a piece of buckskin a good many woodland trophies that I found. Among these were wing and tail feathers from wild turkeys, dropped antlers from the white-tail, and tusks from the bleached skull of a wild boar. At one place far down the ridge I came to a group of small bush-headed black cypresses; here, I knew, would be a pond. But the water was gone. The bottom, however, was lined with a deep carpet of sphagnum moss. Into this strange depression I stepped, the moss perfectly muffling my footfalls. Because of the silence of my approach I walked to within six feet of two deer lying in the huckleberries. Both were does. One sprang east, and the other west. The second deer landed on a space of bare sand. From her bed I measured this jump; it was a little more than sixteen feet. In jumping from its bed a deer often takes a nervous and most effective stance. I have observed one of these lithe creatures go through with the whole performance.

A deer lies down like a sheep or like cattle, and he is very fond of laying his head along his flanks. Sometimes he will stretch out his legs rather awkwardly. But when a deer hears or scents danger, before he

jumps he will jerk himself into the position of a crouched rabbit. To do this he draws his legs in swiftly, turns so as to right himself, and crouches in such a manner that his great legs have just the purchase they need for a leap of twenty feet or so. Understood in this manner, the deer's power of springing far out of his bed seems the less remarkable.

Neither one of the deer that I started went far. Both of them stopped on the ridge, eyed me curiously, seemed not to discover my presence formidable, and then stole away softly into the dim greenery of the Ocean's wilds.

Beyond the cypresses I came to a deer's rubbing place. Here was a small live-oak, the acorn of which must have been brought there by some bird—probably a blue jay. The tree showed signs of age, but it was not more than twenty feet high. Its limbs were low-sweeping. Under it I picked up several dropped antlers, and on its trunk and limbs I discovered many smooth places where the bucks had rubbed the velvet from their tingling horns. This would have been done in late August and in September; here again in late February and in March they evidently repaired to allay their itching foreheads by rubbing off their outworn horns. The oak itself might well have been a century old, and I wondered how many deer had repaired to it, and how many others had passed it. Standing at a point in the Ocean where, I believed, many a deer, pursued from the pine-lands, would feel himself wholly safe, the oak took on for me the aspect of a sanctuary—or at least a

sentry guarding the green mysterious gateway to the lone and secret home of wild things harried and hunted.

Beyond the oak the ridge ended. I found myself ringed on three sides by lipping coverts of endless tender foliage. Over the bays and sweet-gums and myrtles vast vines had clambered, spreading and lowering gorgeous tapestries of greenery, starred here and there by golden jasmine blooms. As far as I could see the misty emerald Ocean expanded, solitary and beautiful. I will not say that no human eye had ever before visioned this lost beauty, for of old the Seminoles might have penetrated this primeval wasteland of loveliness. But I doubt if another white man has seen it. Nor was I to see much more of it.

In the sand at the end of the ridge I discovered a straight rut, broad and deep; it was the trail of a diamond-back, and a fresh one. This fact leads me to say that the temperature of the Ocean is probably higher than that of the surrounding country. For five miles it is a solid windbreak; the winds pass over it, but not through it. There the sun gleams with wan persuasive warmth, and there the airs are still and balmy and aromatic.

For some distance into the undergrowth I followed the rattler's trail; but such business involves a degree of nervous tension not long sustainable, especially when one must be stooping in a twilight jungle to keep the track of such a creature. In the highroad off the Ocean I had seen killed one of these grim monsters that was nearly eight feet in length. To

meet one in the Ocean's jungles might be an encounter too exciting to be comfortable. Out of the dense copse I flushed a covey of quail; they whirred away wildly. Back on the ridge once more, I felt that I could probably make no farther progress into the Ocean itself. The sun was getting close to the black barrier of pines, far to the westward. With a species of reluctant relief I turned down the ridge; before dusk set in I was in the plantation highroad once more.

Had I really explored the Ocean? Far from it. I had merely blundered along the margins of an enchanted land. Despite my ride, I feel that the Ocean is still unviolated; and so it is likely to remain—a wide woodland sea of silent, shimmering country, dewy, veiled, sequestered, eternal and virgin in some mystic, spiritual springtime.

XVI

IN DANGER

I SHALL never forget seeing an old three-legged raccoon play a comical trick on one of my proud setter dogs. It happened down on Cedar Island, at the mouth of the Santee, in South Carolina. I had been after wild ducks, and had with me a good setter.

Early one morning we were going down an animal path through the marsh. The dog was in the lead. Suddenly he gave a yelp and stepped on the gas. Just ahead, the path debouched upon a sandy flat, beyond which was a shallow pond, a half acre in extent. Running forward, I saw my dog trying to raise a small sand storm as he chased a raccoon across the sand spit. The gait of the raccoon, always peculiar, had in this case its oddness emphasized by the fact that this individual had but one hind leg.

A raccoon, being a genial philosopher, generally paces thoughtfully, nosing his way silently and seriously through life. He is a gentle, contemplative, harmless soul, and it bores him immeasurably to run. In this instance, however, to run was the discreet thing to do.

By the time the sand storm had subsided, I saw the



A RACCOON CLIMBING A TREE

raccoon swimming, with my setter in eager and confident pursuit. About halfway across the pond the somewhat pathetic fugitive came to a halt. The water must have been three feet deep; but the raccoon brought up against a submerged stump or log, and upon this he now climbed with wary caution, turning meanwhile to face his menacing follower.

The expression on that astute creature's face was worth a trip to see. It was exceedingly tolerant, somewhat condescending, very anciently wise; yet it showed a mellow wisdom rather than a sharp craftiness. With perfect serenity he awaited the approach of the setter.

When the dog came within reach, the raccoon gently and with utter deftness reached out his delicate black hands, made them rest with nice adjustment on the head of the dog, and then thrust the setter's head firmly downward beneath the water, holding it there for a moment.

Wildly waved the dog's tail and hind feet in the air, signalling me for help. Then he came up, spluttering and coughing, and very much amazed. He decided to come ashore for a conference with me. Right swiftly he swam back toward the place where I was standing. As he came out of the water, he barked somewhat frantically, whined, turned to look toward the 'coon, gazed beseechingly at me.

I suppose he was asking me who had thrown the brick, what had torpedoed him, and whether I had not better do something about it. To hide his confusion, he appeared to be trying to suggest to me

that he had been tempted to touch forbidden fruit and that he was really very repentant about it.

For some time I stood and watched the raccoon sitting sedately and with infinite patience and tolerance on the submerged stump. He had showed self-possession of a sort worthy of record; now he was calmly awaiting his chance to quit the pond unmolested. I left him there, knowing well that he could take care of himself. My setter, when he turned away, gave a few farewell barks, chill and foolish; but clearly he was immensely relieved that we had decided to abandon the pursuit of what he deemed so rude a creature.

The intelligence of Nature's children is usually of a high order. Seldom is it disappointing to one who loves to see resourcefulness. Often it is disappointing to one who wishes them ill. What a man will do in a crisis depends less perhaps upon his education and even upon his character than upon a certain native strain of circumvention, almost wild in its intuitive power, a strain that centuries of civilization have not been able to eradicate.

Swift and discerning precision of judgment, in times of peril, or what we call presence of mind, is, I think, a far more common trait in wild creatures than in man. There are at least two reasons for this fact: The senses of a wild creature are infinitely more subtle and fine than those of a human being; and then, a wild thing's life depends, or may well depend, almost constantly on its artful alertness.

Perhaps the most amazing evidence of extraordi-

nary wariness in a wild creature I ever saw was on a lonely mountain ridge of southern Pennsylvania. The old gobbler that was the hero in the case was not exactly in a tight place (at least he did not know that he was), but any wild turkey's game eternal is to see that he does not get into one.

I had been sitting on an old chestnut log overlooking a deep wooded ravine. It was early in November. Poignant scents were in the air; dewy, hale aromas from damp leaves, from ripened misty wild grapes, from the tangy mountain pines. The ruinous woodland was still hung with the tattered gold of yet un-fallen leaves. It was a warm, still morning. I could hear distinctly a squirrel drop a chestnut fifty yards away. Damp atmosphere is a good carrier of sound.

After a while I heard something rustling the leaves just over the crest of the ridge on one side of which I was stationed. As I knew this might be a wild turkey, the natural behaviour of which I was eager to study, I began to work my way up the hill as noiselessly as possible. On the very crest was a smother of grapevines, with many big leaves still hanging idly, forming an arras fit to veil a wildwood mystery. Into the privacy of this sweet-smelling canopy I crawled; and through it I peered cautiously down the side of the slope beyond.

Not thirty yards away, glimmering in the sheen of his regal plumage, stood a magnificent wild gobbler. There is, there can be, no finer bird.

He must have heard me, for he was standing erect, rather slim, graceful as a lance in rest. I could see

his beady black eye fathom the forest, search the world for an enemy. I lay still, trying not to let the slightest movement of mine make the vines tremble. Count on a wild turkey to hear any noise, to see any motion. After a few minutes he went back to the task that he had been performing; he began to rake in the leaves for chestnuts, for acorns, for anything that would do for breakfast.

Now, scratching, as we generally call this process of a bird's searching in trash for food, is usually a very energetic affair; there is an element of hefty vigour and haste about it. The first thing I noticed about my superb wild friend was that he was extremely deliberate. Indeed, it is no exaggeration to say that the slow moving pictures thrown on the screen to show every motion of rapid action were here displayed in reality. Cautiously I palmed my watch to time the gobbler's scratching. In a full minute he had raked the leaves back only four times! I began to feel that I had never before fully comprehended the meaning of the word caution.

Presently I saw him execute a manœuvre that, for wariness, would be difficult to match. With his right foot he had slowly raked back a big fistful of damp leaves. These he intended to kick away from him by the straightening of his leg backward. But in the very pitch of the motion he thought he heard something. His nerves and muscles tightened. And there he stood on one foot, with the other, crammed full of leaves, extended behind him and well off the ground. Seldom have I seen anything in wild life so very odd yet so in-

teresting. For a full half minute thus he stood, a wonder of wariness. The first sign of relaxation came in that extended foot, from the grasp of which certain bright leaves were permitted deliberately to fall.

On another occasion my brother and I were hunting a predatory wildcat, and we thought we had him cornered. To begin with, the joyous yowling of our hounds had assured us that this bay lynx, after a long run down the river bank, had at last taken to a tree. That it was a lynx we were as certain as the frantic sprawled footprints that he had left could tell us. Moreover, he had run down on a narrow spit of land jutting out into the river.

He could not return by the same route by which he had fled. He dared not swim. Cats don't like water. He couldn't vanish. Therefore, we reasoned, he had climbed a tree; and from this we could promptly dislodge him. We had rather sinister designs on this old brigand of the river swamps, for he could easily qualify for every medal to which a wild animal marauder is eligible.

"He can't get back this way," my brother told me.

"He won't swim," I said.

"We've got him at last," we agreed.

Down on the tiny peninsula we went on a run, down toward the clamouring dogs. They were baying at the foot of a huge water oak, which in the South does not shed its leaves in winter; or sheds them so late that it is almost an evergreen. Somewhere in the whispering tower of gorgeous foliage was our grim

fugitive. We should soon see him, we believed, crouched in a crotch, or lying flattened on a limb. But somehow, look as we might, we could not manage to discern his tawny coat.

Beyond the water oak and near the river was a large sweet bay tree. I saw a limb of this quiver. Brother and I moved down toward it. Ere we reached it, a lithe and powerful body shot far from it over the whispering fringe of river marsh. We heard the body of the wildcat strike the water resoundingly. The dogs, unaware of what had happened, were still baying the oak tree with intense loyalty. Brother and I climbed to the low limbs of the bay so that we could see over the marsh. Far out in the river was the wily lynx, swimming for dear life. Indeed, he had already put so much distance between us that he was safe.

"I thought you said he wouldn't swim," my brother said, by way of amiable rebuke.

"I guess he couldn't think of any other sensible thing to do." I rejoined. "He must have known that he was cornered, and he did the only thing possible."

"He probably crept out of the oak and into the bay to execute this very manœuvre," my brother said. "The dogs might have bayed here all day—with the cat on the other side of the river."

If we watch these wild things carefully, we shall discover no cause for exaggerating their wisdom in order to make it seem interesting; for, truly, "fiction lags after truth, invention is unfruitful, and imagination cold and barren." When I read of some of the imaginary deeds of super-animals so unlike the wise

and simple creatures with which I am familiar, I cannot avoid a suspicion that the tellers of such tales are striking a pose, in imitation of that famous little statue in the Metropolitan Museum in New York City, a statue called "Hercules Throwing the Bull."

Of the more impressive examples of the resourcefulness of these wild brothers of ours, none ever affected me more than a scene I witnessed one afternoon in the wild pinelands of the Carolina coastal country. There was a certain primeval sorcery about this business that stirred me deeply; and I shall try to give it to you as accurately as possible.

About three miles from home there is a solitary swamp, vast in extent, almost impenetrable to man and even to dogs. But it is the greatest deer sanctuary of my knowledge. Into the fastness of this strange refuge all the harried and the hunted seem to come; and here they are safe.

Long ago I discovered that if I took up a watch on the silent fringes of this secret place, a watch beginning late in the afternoon and extending as long as there was light, I could see many beautiful fugitives trooping forth, delicately to wander the dim country of the night. Some of the best hours in my life have been spent on the mystic borders of this lonely, visionary place, and never without reward. But the time when I was most highly recompensed was at high noon, in broad daylight, when I had not gone into the woods for observation at all.

It was mid-September, and the weather was insufferably hot. In that region such weather is usually

the harbinger of a hurricane. On this particular day I rather expected a storm; and out of the southwest it came—a black thunder-rack, with long dusky streamers that trailed ominously like Kansas “twisters.”

A stillness brooded over the world. Soon the great yellow pines began to moan and sigh. Far off I could hear the distant trampling of the storm as it advanced through the pinelands—the low rumble of the thunder, the deep battle song of the winds, the distant chaotic tumult of the roaring rain. I knew that home was the place to be; but as I had herded a small band of cattle and was trying to get them home, too, I thought that all of us had better go along together, taking what rain was coming. At the time I had not gauged the character of the approaching storm. But, as I soon discovered, there were wiser creatures that had comprehended its nature.

My frightened cattle and I were working our way along the edges of the swamp when the hurricane darkened the woods; and then it was that I saw the wild-life sight that so vividly impressed me. Silently, with that indefinable beauteous grace that all genuinely wild things have, many deer came stealing out of the swamp. There was something concerted in their coming; they came as a band of pilgrims into a new country.

Slowly I began to realize that they were getting out of the swamp because of the big timber there, and were coming into the open pinelands, where there were many clear stretches of broom sedge. They knew

that they were menaced by falling trees and were seeking open country. In an ordinary rain, or even a thunderstorm, a deer will not move from his bed.

But these deer had evidently sensed that the storm approaching was the kind to smash timber, and that it was their business to find a place where no timber was. Troopingly they came, shadowy forms that paused faëriely, moved with elfin grace, evasively melted through the low myrtle and bays. I tried to count them, but they were so continuously appearing and reappearing, and the woods were darkening so rapidly, that I could not be accurate. Occasionally a proud buck would lift and turn his head to wind the storm, his black nose wrinkling as his nostrils widened. A tiny fawn, a late one, with its exquisite star spots still shining, passed me close. I marvelled at the daintiness of this woodland child, in delicacy and charm the rival of any wild flower I ever saw.

As I watched the quiet escape of these timid wild creatures from danger, an escape effected in concert and with a constant wariness against other possible perils, I thought how little we really know of the hopes and the fears of these dwellers in the wastelands and the wildernesses!

I thought, also, that, despite many arguments to the contrary, it might be quite likely that a mighty and merciful Creator put these things into the world to give us ideas of wild grace and beauty, to afford us woodland comradeship, to let us see palpably the soul of the mysterious secret forest. For if a deer, elegant and palpitant, eternally poised to a natural

and therefore an unelaborate pitch of fervent grace, does not represent the heart of the dewy, the fragrant, the lonely woods, we shall not ever see it.

Glimmering into misty remoteness the pinelands swept away into far-off lands where rolled a sea of golden broom sedge. Into this safe country the deer trooped. Once or twice I heard one bleat faintly; a doe calling to her fawn, no doubt, and the baby answering its mother, telling her he was coming along all right. A certain great stag appeared to exercise an overlordship. Under his able leadership this "retreat of the ten thousand" was perfectly executed.

Two hours later, when the gale was at its height, I saw great pines go down like a whisper, and I saw gigantic arms of ancient live-oaks wrenched off like straws. The deer had guessed right. If a man wants to know what in the way of weather is coming, he should observe the behaviour of his wild kindred.

I said that the deer took no especial notice of the cattle. As a matter of fact, the two sometimes consort. I have many times seen them together on those lonely barrier islands off the Southern coast. A curious incident illustrating both the deer's resourcefulness in danger and his inclination toward keeping company, even with another species, was told me by a friend, Ed. Lincoln, a renowned woodsman. I shall try to quote his very words:

"One day, while in the woods driving home a big drove of hogs, thirty or more, I heard hounds running in my direction. Some of my hogs were in the dry bed of an old drainage canal that ran from a swamp to the

sea marsh. This canal was about fifteen feet deep. Dense bushes grew on either bank. By keeping my drove in the canal bed, I could manage them better than if they were in the woods. I stopped to listen to the dogs.

"After a while I heard a sound in the bushes on the farther side of the canal; then I saw a buck, a very old one, with crumpled horns and a gray face, steal down the side of the canal. He saw the hogs ahead of him. He did not, I believe, suspect my being there. What did he do but trot forward and join the hogs! I think he meant to conceal his presence in a crowd. I crossed the canal, and when the hounds came up, I beat them off.

"For about a mile the deer travelled along very amiably with the hogs; then we came to a place where the hogs had to come out, because of a big alligator hole in the bed of the canal. I watched to see whether, once in the woods, the buck would leave his new-found companions. But he didn't. For several hundred yards he journeyed on in a most odd-looking but friendly fashion. As soon as I showed myself, however, the stag suddenly seemed to recall an urgent business engagement elsewhere."

Once or twice in my life I have seen a deer in a crisis do a very peculiar thing which not many men, I believe, have observed. Therefore I have tried to confirm my judgment by comparing my experience with that of old woodsmen. Several of these have told me that they have seen the same performance.

Let us say that a wise old stag is surrounded by hunters, and that he is somewhat bewildered as to what he had best do. Then it is that he is likely to take one or more leaps straight into the air—not for the purpose of making a break to get away, but rather to secure elevation in order to survey the situation.

One day I was near a famous deer thicket where the bays and myrtles and whortleberries were about six feet high. A splendid old buck was suddenly started. He did not steal craftily out, nor did he go crashing grandly away through the brush. By no means was he content to stand until he knew where he was going.

I happened to be quite near him—close enough actually to get the expression on his face when he made his two prodigious leaps. Straight up he went, his wide liquid eyes gleaming with intelligence and surveying the landscape swiftly, warily, with an acuteness almost fierce. Again he leaped—this time faced the other way. After that he resorted to the whitetail's tactics of skulking and dodging, with the result that he eluded all his enemies. In this case, the lone buck had acted as his own scout cruiser, his own guide, his own sentry, his own observation balloon.

Of another performance, perhaps more remarkable, a feat that likewise came under my own observation, I shall briefly tell. It concerns a phantom buck; at least, such was the impression he succeeded in conveying; for he deliberately walked up to me, and then vanished.

One day I was on a Christmas hunt with a gay party of friends. A negro driver had posted me at a certain stand; and as he had no further duties for the moment he stayed with me. Ere long, straight ahead of us, we saw a ten-point stag sidle out of a shimmering thicket, roused from his day bed by the tumult of the hunt.

Leaving the thicket, he entered a vast stretch of broom sedge, breast high, with only a few pines standing here and there. He was coming head-on for me. But he appeared in no especial hurry to make my acquaintance. Indeed, when thirty yards out in the waving gold of the broom sedge, he came to a halt, his regal head held high, his expression one of thoughtful consideration. When he paused with such deliberateness, I said to the negro beside me, a man whose woodlore is wide and profound:

"What is he doing now?"

"He's readin' his book," the negro answered.

I like that explanation: the stag was studying his book of tactics for the proper bit of strategy that the exigency required. The deer at this time was, for so secretive, so visionary an animal, absurdly close to me, dangerously obvious. But suddenly he was not. He vanished. This dealer in shadowy subterfuges, in ancient sorcery, was gone.

Believing, of course, that he had merely crouched in the tall broom sedge, I walked slowly forward, at each moment fully expecting him to bound up and sail wildly away, carrying full canvas. But he did no

such thing. I came to the spot where but a few moments before he had been standing. He was not there.

"Where can he be?" I asked the negro vaguely.

"See him off yonder," the unperturbed negro said, pointing to a white flag two hundred yards off. There he was, sure enough—and safe enough.

A little later, by following the course taken by a trailing hound, I discovered that the buck had crouched beneath the golden broom grass; then he had literally crawled in a semicircle until he was well past us. When he had completed his sleight-of-foot performance, he simply fled in standard fashion.

On one occasion I went over on the Santee Delta, just across the river from my old home, to see what could be done about some of the stock that had been marooned on islets there by high waters. The whole vast delta, indeed, was submerged. Cruising along the whispering fringes of a drowned brier patch, I saw far off a white object perched on a small stump. At first I thought the white patch above the yellow water was an egret or a crane. I paddled over. To my amazement, as the object took definite shape, I discerned it to be an old white goat, half wild, that had been on the island with the cattle and the hogs. He could not swim to the mainland, because it was perhaps a mile away.

Beneath him now swirled wild waters fifteen feet deep. He was on a stump not more than five inches in diameter. It was so small that he had some difficulty in accommodating all four feet on it at one time.

The top of the stump was a good foot above the water. How he found it and how he climbed it were matters of some marvel to me. But there he was, absurdly drawn up, miserable, but possessed, even in such a plight, of a goat's watchful *savoir faire*.

It has always seemed to me that a goat has as much more subtle sagacity than a sheep as a cat has more than a dog. At least, the goat's intelligence is of a singularly amusing, discerning, canny sort. When I had brought my boat within ten feet of the stump, without any invitation the ancient mariner took a mighty leap and landed with precision safe in the craft. We might have upset had he not suddenly helped me balance the boat.

Here, then, was a creature that had apprehended peril; had met it sagely; had recognized rescue, and had readily accepted it. During our voyage homeward the goat chewed with much complacency; and when the bow of my boat touched the landing at home, he tripped jauntily out, and at once began to browse with hasty unconcern.

XVII

THE PHILOSOPHER AMONG DOGS

THESE is a certain type of man who, if you ask him to meet you at a definite place, will be sure not to be there. It was so with Steve. I had told the negro not to fail to have a rendezvous with me at the plantation house that afternoon, as I was bringing up a hound puppy that I wanted him to keep for me.

The puppy and I arrived duly, but apparently we made up the whole party. I had driven ten miles in a rickety buggy over a wilderness road, and it was late in the afternoon. I had to return that night. It seemed wise for me to make the little hound comfortable under the big plantation porch, leaving him there until the next day, when I should return. By that time, Steve might come, too.

There was, under the porch, a huge drag-log with a ring and staple in its end; we used it to keep a dog from straying. To this I now tied the black pup—a big-eared, wavy-tailed, liquid-eyed youngster, five months old. His mother had been killed in an accident before this little one's eyes were open. I had raised him on a bottle. He cared a good deal for me, as I did for him. Already, true to form, on a trial run in a

thicket, he had begun to yowl amazing music—strangely discordant in the house or yard, but entrancing in the wild woods. Now I gave him a little feed. I arranged a pine-straw bed for him. Then, leaving him all alone, his big eyes gazing after me with wonder and regret, I started on my long drive homeward.

I know not exactly why, but I worried a good deal about the pup. He looked so little and human, so lonely and appealing as I left him; and there shone in his eyes that strange, beautiful, patient light of utter fidelity and persistent affection. I thought of him throughout the homeward drive; and when I woke after a restless night, he was first in my thoughts. And well he might have been! For when I went out into the yard, there he lay at the gate—a pathetic, heart-breaking urchin, cringing lest I should punish him.

Honestly, I could have wept like a child. I suppose that as soon as I had left him on the plantation he had started his Odyssey. Ulysses may have had his Scylla and Charybdis, his Sirens to forego, his Circean isles to pass. But at least he was a strong man, with hardy comrades, the master of a great ship. My little adventurer was chained to a dastardly log that wouldn't even drag straight (I read the whole story that day when I retraced his marvellous journey), chained by the neck to a ponderous log! He had a dark and unknown road of ten miles through mysterious woods; he had never travelled it before, save with me in the buggy that afternoon. There were long

water-slashes through which he had to wade and swim; there were dreary stretches of deep sand; there were wayside stumps and bushes that caught at the drag, which trailed at a crazy angle. Yet through it all the little black hound came, a heroic spirit, not satisfied until, at dawn, when the morning star rode dying in the sky, he lay prostrated at his master's gate. . . . A man did not have to be sentimental and imaginative to discover in that youngster's behaviour proof of what love can and will do.

Possibly the very smartest thing I ever saw a hound do—as the story just told illustrates the most touching and affecting—happened late one afternoon while I was in a small outbuilding in the plantation yard that we called “the Castle.” It had been a big smoke-house; but we put windows in, built benches along its sides, and transformed it into a place where negroes who came to see us could wait comfortably. A plantation negro does not mind a half-day wait if he can sit by the fire, especially if he has company. In many ways he has solved the problem of life as an Oriental; and with amazing equanimity he accepts the changes and chances of existence.

I was waiting for a negro who had promised to give me the exact street address of a flock of thirty-four wild turkeys that rumour had reported his seeing. Beside me lay a black-and-tan hound pup of which I was very fond. He was drowsing contentedly, but his head was toward the open door, and I noticed that he roused himself several times to look out. I

shifted my seat so as to get his vision. Full in the doorway, regally framed by the sunset, stood a sagacious old hound named Ringwood, a black beauty with great down-hanging ears, heavy dewlaps, and a grand, melancholy face. It may really be a shame to say so, but this hound's countenance, in its serene majesty and in its profoundly erudite expression, always strongly reminded me of highly romantic pictures of Dante and of Tennyson! Apologies are, I presume, due; and such as are necessary are proffered.

But old Ringwood would bear watching. He had a way of going skylarking at night all by himself. Sometimes, when there was no reason apparently for him to feel guilty, he would give me casual sidelong glances. Also I heard rumours that sheep, miles from the plantation, had been slaughtered by a monstrous black hound. I had no proof of Ringwood's implication in such sinister business, but I was kept uneasy. Yet the dog was so superb after deer, and his career had been so long and splendid, that I hated to suspect him. Of one thing, however, I was determined: he should not ruin the pup. Dogs are laughably like people; one may go straight, but two will jump the traces and splurge all over the landscape. I have often noticed that when two dogs frolic much together, execute little secret expeditions, form a soul-mateship, it is high time to look for trouble. This is especially true if the older dog has questionable motives.

I had noticed a decided intimacy springing up between Ringwood and the pup; and while I counted on the old dog to train the youngster legitimately, I

didn't want any special courses in sheep-killing given. The pup was like a schoolboy—innocent, and ready for any fun. I could tell now that he wanted to join the old hound, and would have done so but for my admonishing him to lie still. Yet the thing went on. Ringwood kept coming to the door, luscious invitation glowing in his eyes; once, too, he whined enticingly. At last I told him shortly to get out. Crestfallen and thoughtful, he turned away. Within a few minutes, however, he had come back and had stalked into the little room, where he stood by the fire, gazing into its depths. He did not lie down. Infected by his mood, I began the same kind of silent gazing into the flames, when I was roused from my reverie by a slight scuffle beside me. The two dogs were already half-way to the door.

Ringwood had the puppy by the scruff of the neck, and was gently and guilefully dragging him off for a frolic! The big dog's demeanour was so clumsily surreptitious that I couldn't be angry, and his manœuvre was so crafty that my admiration was greater than my annoyance. Ringwood had figured out the whole thing in that massive head of his; and his way out of the difficulty was certainly as clever a one as a man could have devised. He wanted the pup; the pup wouldn't come. What then remained but to wade right in and steal the comrade for whom he was lonely? I went out into the yard with them, the world aglow with sunset, and there let them have their fun together; but I saw to it that they did not get out of my sight.

Whether considering dogs or men, thinking on their character and their destiny, I always wonder what it is they really want in life. Is it wealth? Sympathy? Power? Understanding? The strong desire for fame inherent in us may be just a passionate yearning to have others recognize our own aspirations. A man, perhaps, bears the same relation to a dog that God does to a man. A dog is certainly happiest when he can please his master. With all reverence I can say that if I would only trust God as my dog trusts me, there would be no trouble for me henceforth, even in this difficult world.

About four miles from home there is a strange, wild region. It is a singular stretch of inviolate country. I have been deep into its mysterious heart; but there are parts of it that no human eye has ever seen. It is a famous sanctuary for deer; and I used to love to haunt its fringes late in the afternoon in order to see the deer come trooping from their daytime fastness, to roam the star-lighted pinelands.

One afternoon I went through a wild thicket on the edge of this place, emerged on an airy ridge grown to huckleberries, and here waited for what might come for me to see. Two fox squirrels, a wild gobbler, a covey of quail, and a doe rewarded my wait. I stayed later than I had planned to, and it was dusk ere I roused myself to turn homeward. A fog had set in; and in getting up from my seat on an old log, I turned—and in that instant lost my sense of direction. In fog, in the forest, at twilight, that is a perilously easy thing to do.

Disconcerted, I stood looking all around at the beautiful, sinister place, fading, lonely, mist-wreathed, full of wonder, hinting of eternal things. To be truthful, I was lost; not because I did not know where I was, but because I did not know which way to go. While thus standing in doubt, I heard a solitary hound, deep in the fathomless swamp. He was holding a long trail, a deer's, I thought. Perhaps he might get me out of my plight.

In that part of the country we have a signal in deer hunting. Three long blasts on a horn mean, "It is all over; come to me." It is really meant for fellow-hunters, but smart dogs quickly become aware of the significance of the signal. I decided to try it now. I blew my hunting horn three times, the sound carrying far through the damp, still woods. Almost immediately the hound stopped trailing. After one or two desultory yelps he was silent. I continued to sound the signal. . . . Within five minutes, out of the dripping bushes came the hound. He was a stranger to me, but I took him in. We made friends; but to bind our friendship fast I ran a buckhide string through his collar.

"Old fellow," I said, "the hunt's over for to-day. Let's go home."

The hound whined. I let the string lie slack on his neck, giving him the lead. The string tightened. He started, leading me out of the swamp, far through the dim green night of the forest. I felt that he was going in the wrong direction; but it pays to trust a dog. A hound will seldom go home directly through

the woods. He prefers to make for the nearest road, down which he can make better time. My rescuer led me through wild thickets, across water, over some log bridges that he clung to easily enough, but off which I slipped with equal ease. At last he came to a dead halt. It was now quite dark. In a moment I realized that we were in a big road; in another moment I recognized which road it was, and my sense of direction was restored. Home for me lay to the northward; but my guide wanted me to turn toward the south. I loosed him, and into the misty darkness he vanished. He had hardly saved my life, for I had been in no real peril; but he had helped me vitally when I was helpless. I often think of that mysterious and opportune stranger; but his identity I never discovered.

Of all the dogs that I have ever known, Sarsaparilla, an alleged hound, was the least promising in appearance. He was owned by one of the negroes on our South Carolina place; and he was named back in those old days when patent medicines and soft drinks were first making their way into the remote hinterlands of the plantations, and when negroes got a social kick out of naming their dogs, their children, and their mules Neuralgia, Asthma, Sarsaparilla, Ambrosia, and Dandruff.

This beast, Sarsaparilla, had other faults beside his effervescing name: he had apparently no sense at all, he was too tall, his head had no particular shape, his gait was an absurd walk. He gave one the impression

of travelling on stilts. His colour was a discord of mangy yellowish white. His facial expression was notably vacant. Sarsaparilla was simply ludicrous; he just wouldn't do. So, for a long time, I thought. But there came a day when I was to learn a mighty lesson about not judging by appearances. I was to learn that courage, like wealth, is solely a matter of the heart; and it took a yellow dog to teach me.

When great floods swept down the Santee River, they dislodged from the gloomy and impenetrable swamps above us a good deal more than mere sedge and drifting logs. Live things were in the flotsam. Deer came to our very back yard, shy wild turkeys, roving cattle, wild hogs of huge size and savage temper.

One morning when I went down to the stable yard I was greeted by a shrill complaining from the hogs that were penned in the ample enclosure. Something was badly disconcerting them. When I came up, I found that they had a visitor, a rangy wild boar from the swamps, a shaggy hyena-like creature, with gleaming tusks, alarming bristles, and a most truculent mien. I at once saw that he had jumped a low panel in the fence, and that, by setting two rails there, I could effect his capture. The thing was managed. But when I came to open the gate, he charged me, mouth wide, bristles high, tail erect. I got the gate shut not a second too soon. He checked his speed, champed his great jaws at me sullenly, and then turned back to torment the other dwellers in the yard.

Not wishing to shoot the boar, I decided to catch him with dogs. I therefore repaired to the near-by negro settlement, where I gathered in seven dogs and as many negroes, all of whom read between the lines of my story the glad tidings of Christmas bacon to be had for the catching. We had a motley pack: a bulldog, two hounds, an alleged collie, two plain curs of the most obscure antecedents, and Sarsaparilla. I remonstrated with Sarsaparilla's owner about bringing this soft drink to the slaughter. He laughed in a shamefaced way, as if he thought his dog were being taken along to be the clown of the fray. I recalled the boar's size and mien, looked at this burlesque on rickety stilts, and pity filled my heart.

Reaching the barnyard, we decided that an assault *en masse* was the proper manœuvre. The dogs were to be the shock troops, and we were to follow up the advantage that they had obtained over the common enemy. We had sundry cudgels and ropes with which to belabour the victim.

The seven dogs went through the gate in a body; and the wild boar accommodated them by not permitting them to hesitate for a moment as to which hog they were after. Incontinently he rushed them. With great valour we watched the fray from the farther side of the fence, waiting until our chance seemed secure enough to enable us to cross the obstruction that protected us. Suddenly, hurled high over the fence, the bulldog rejoined us; all the zest seemed gone out of him. Then the two hounds fled

across the yard and skulked into the stable; their attitude indicated that they carried no tornado insurance. The collie stood off and barked with hollow ferocity. The two plain dogs went manfully to work, but one was trampled by the boar. The other seized the monster's ear and hung on grimly. Yet the beast would rip him open, I knew.

Just then, Sarsaparilla, who had calmly and aloofly watched proceedings, stepped niftily in. He approached rather fastidiously, not from dismay but from a certain curious regard for finesse. Stationed behind the hog, he looked thoughtfully at the shaggy brute; then he quietly bowed his lunatic, dolesome head, mouthed the boar's upper haunch until he had a deliberate hold, sank his teeth, set his legs, and began grimly to shake his head.

The boar, I think, got one glimpse of what had him; he probably imagined it a saber-tooth tiger. Savagely shaking off the dog from his head, he squealed shrilly and turned to run. Sarsaparilla said quite firmly, "Not so fast."

The bewildered boar could not get loose. The other dogs came back. We jumped the fence, and soon we had the old marauder from the swamps securely roped. Sarsaparilla then stalked sedately off; he had condescended to help us; but he was not going to join in any of our puerile excitement.

"What kind of dog is that?" I asked his owner.

"God in he'ben knows," replied he, meaning no irreverence; "but he got *all* de sense. Sometimes I gwine change his name to Solomon."

Many people of enlightened minds often gravely argue the question, Do animals reason? Is their apparent mental power but instinct? For my part, I think many animals do not have to reason: they are too smart. I have a great reverence for instinct. It is like tact, taking one where all the logic and all the knowledge of the world cannot gain admittance. Infallibly certain and direct, it reaches its goal before reason has decided whether or not to leave the mark. I wonder whether we have not been rating instinct too low? Women, we say, have a sixth sense, knowing clairvoyantly baseness or nobility in men. Is it not instinct? The wild creatures of my acquaintance and the dogs of high and low degree; they may not reason, they simply *know*. What is the use of travelling in the ox cart of reason if you have the racing car of instinct at your disposal? Dogs do not reason, because they who have the exquisite gift of instinct do not have to go through laborious and *bourgeois* mental processes!

I used to have a big foxhound named Blue; and I found him capable of carrying a trail almost as old as one that a bloodhound will take. He would follow deer, fox, or turkey. One day I was greatly amused over his bafflement. He had a wild gobbler trail on damp leaves and wet sand. As the scent was heavy and fresh, he was absolutely sure of himself. Suddenly the trail ended. Blue cast wildly about in little circles, then in wider ones, snuffing feverishly, gulping avidly. Ravenously he sought, and he knew that I was watching him. Aware of his own ability and of my

faith in him, his loss of the trail hurt him cruelly. Of course I knew that the turkey had simply taken wing. But I let Blue work on for a while. At last he gave up, came to me humbly, sat down beside me, and whined uneasily, saying as plainly as could be, "It must have been a ghost. I never was so swindled in my life. But try me on something else."

That same week I tested his nose in a rather interesting way. I used often to take him in the buggy with me, and when I came to an interesting track, would let him try its savour. Coming through a small thicket of pines, I saw a peg-horn buck launch himself lithely over the road. That was just at four o'clock of a winter's afternoon. Blue was in the buggy with me then; but I did not set him on the trail. The next morning, driving over the same road, sixteen hours later, I alighted from the buggy with Blue, just to see if the trail meant anything to him. He took it eagerly. I followed; and it was not hard to keep up with him, for when he gave tongue he had a habit of turning partly 'round, throwing his head back and sinking on his haunches while his wild music rang out. Some three hundred yards from the road we started the buck that I had seen the afternoon before. I have heard many tales of hounds following cold trails, but I have never actually known one to find and to follow one older than that.

Then there was a hound named Whistling Buoy, a great black-and-white beauty from the mountains of western North Carolina. He gave me cause to chris-

ten him as he was named. The very morning after his arrival I took him on a leash with me into the home woods, walking down some of the old sandy roads, just to see whether he would take urgent notice of some of the fresh deer tracks that crossed the old trails. About a mile from the house, the hound, which until then had been very intelligent and friendly, suddenly developed a stubborn streak. He pulled back, he whined, he looked at me with the narrowed, glittering eye of strange misgiving. He appeared badly frightened; he might be sick, I thought. I tried to lead him forward, but vain was my coaxing. When I stroked his massive head, he threw it back and gave a wildly melancholy howl. It had all the weird eeriness and warning heard in the deep mysterious tone of a whistling buoy. Hence, I christened my minstrel. Again he howled. Then I remembered.

Full five months before this there had been killed, some fifteen feet from where the hound had stopped, a monster diamond-back rattler, a veritable chimera. Nearly eight feet it had measured. Its body had for a long time been hung on a little persimmon tree. Nearly a half year later my new hound caught the dread scent with which the ground had been impregnated, knew what it was, halted on what he knew was the brink of death, and warned me to imitate his wariness.

A hound has a genuine and profound distrust of the general scheme of things in this life. Melancholy of an ancient and appealing sort is his. What makes his pessimism worthy of regard is the fact that it has

its source in remarkable sagacity. His honest and steadfast refusal to be optimistic not only lends to his character a noble severity but also gives to his philosophy the serene charm of truth. He invariably seems to me to belong to an older and wiser generation which regards the behaviour of all other living things as an exceedingly juvenile performance. A hound is the only dog that can make me self-conscious of my own ridiculousness. Fixed by his appraising eye, I shrink into my true stature.

Along with most people, I have always noticed that negroes have a peculiar and amiable deftness in controlling animals; and the more untractable the animal, the greater the negro's skill. He employs tones that we cannot imitate; he cajoles irresistibly. Goats and mules, houn' dogs, and oxen with a fearful placid stubbornness yield to the negro's persuasion. There's some subtle mutual understanding. Nor can the white man imitate it; its source is deep, racial, almost occult. The white man can never be so close to the hound as the negro is. I confess, with more pride in the negro's achievement than shame in my own shortcoming, that whenever I can do nothing at all with a hound I turn him over to Prince Alston, with whom I have roamed the woods since boyhood. I hand over to Prince what apparently is but worthless, perhaps dangerous, stuff; the magic of his alchemy will transform the base material into gold.

Yet I never saw him whip a hound. He does the thing by looks, by tones in his voice; occasionally by

fearful imprecations, which the hound appears perfectly to understand. I shall never forget the sudden obedient and conciliatory look that came on the face of a certain brash hound, when Prince, from the back of his mule, yelled to the careless dog, "If you don't come, yuh dog, I'll douse yo' head in a bar'l o' kerosene, and set fire to yo' tail."

The hound heard and heeded the warning. When Prince speaks, hounds listen; and when a hound listens it is because he has caught a tone that penetrates to the place where he lives. There is never a hound, it has seemed to me, but Prince has his wavelength.

I remember how Prince explained to me one day the matter of a hound's behaviour. I had wounded a buck, and the trail was hot. I had one old hound following, a big black-and-tan dog that resembled a bloodhound. He was about a hundred yards ahead of me, and from the news he was broadcasting, I thought he would catch the buck at any minute.

When he suddenly fell quiet, I thought it was all over. But then he gave a peculiar squeal; and to my astonishment back he came through the woods on a dead run, his tail between his legs, his ears mashed against his head, his back arched by the strong ignominy of arrant fear. Close on his heels rushed a frightful Shape—a huge razorback sow, a thing all snout and ribs and bristles and menace. After the hog came about nine little pigs, ludicrous imitations of her both in contour and in mien. Every little pig, without apparently knowing exactly what it was all about,

was valiantly trying not only to keep up with the savage old mother, bent upon the destruction of the hound, but was striving to assume her ferocity of aspect and her earnestness of purpose.

The mad troop headed for me. The hound took refuge behind me. The old sow stopped abruptly, and every little pig executed comically the same manoeuvre. Then the old marauder, her bristles still high, turned and went grumbling off through the forest.

"All right," I said to the hound; "that's over. Now let's find the buck."

But the big hound, his grave and beautiful face full of profoundest thought, appeared not to hear me. I coaxed. I scolded. He maintained his quiet but determined demeanour. Not one step would he go. At last I had to abandon the chase. Telling Prince about it that night, I asked him why it was that, when any ordinary dog would have relished going after either the deer or the hog, the hound had shown the white feather. Prince listened in his quiet, amused, understanding way.

"He wasn't jes' scared," he finally told me; "he hab as much sense as people. A houn' is jes' like a sensible man; he done know when the chance to die is jes' a little too good."

There it was. Prince fathomed the dog's mind. I did not.

I recall with what delight I used to watch a negro named Henry Washington feed a pack of a dozen ravenous hounds. He had on the ground a long cypress board, and this was apparently divided into

spaces, one of which was apportioned to each hound. Bringing out the pot of steaming food, he would line up his famished army, addressing them thus:

"How come you ain't find yo' place, Music? Ain't you know you have a place at table 'tween Buck and Doe? Don't you cross dat line, Check; I don't care how hungry you is. Gambler, you ain't gwine git a t'ing if you edge up on me. Bugle, if I bat you with this spoon, yo' jaw will ache till New Year's Day."

During this admonitory address Henry would be ladling the food on the big board, a portion for each dog; and he had them so trained that, until the banquet was properly spread, not a dog would dare to begin, though certain lean, melancholy faces would loll forward languishingly. Had a white man attempted so delicate a feat as this, the result would have been a complete failure.

The character of the hound appears to undergo no change as the generations pass; he will be as he has been and as he is. His character has much to suggest to the human heart. A sensitive and reflective soul, his spirit has a savour of astute meditation. A hound always seems to have something on his mind.

I once had a pair named Fife and Drum; of these, Fife had a quality of cogency that often astonished me. It paid me to watch him. He spent much of his time sleeping in the sun; but if ever he became uneasy, his unrest meant that he had something heavy on that discriminating mind of his. I remember watching him rise restlessly one day out of a perfectly

good straw bed in the sunshine, look wisely and benevolently about, start off across the yard, and look back at me with sapient bright eyes, as if to communicate to me that he knew something worth knowing. I followed him.

Across an old field he went, and into the woods; almost at once we came upon the track of a buck that had apparently just swum the river. This deer we followed slowly, and with ultimate success.

When the deer was swimming the river, Fife had been sleeping. How had the dog detected his nearness? Was it purely the matter of the wafting of a hot scent his way, or did he have an intimation that game was in his neighbourhood?

A hound is the only dog I know which cannot be said to bark; he sings. He is a music-maker; and if he is well bred, he takes his art seriously. I love to blow a hunting horn just to get the hounds' lyric reaction to it: bass, alto, tenor, soprano—the mournful sweet yowling begins. Some hounds take the matter of their music so religiously that often, even on a hot trail, they will stop to go through the performance, and what they render will be real music. I have seen an old, proud hound with a superb alto, of which he was inordinately vain, fall considerably behind a running pack just because he would pause to give tongue, going through his burst of song as if he were a priest performing a religious rite.

Sometimes a hound will do a good deal more singing than the occasion appears to call for. I once asked a negro why it was that a hound just revels

in yowling rapturously, upon even the slightest, and sometimes upon no, provocation.

"When I go to church," the negro said, "I sing; and sometimes when I is working turpentine I sing and whoop. I do that to ease my soul. A hound, he will ease his soul in the same way."

I love a hound because he appears to me to be a dog of some spiritual significance. His sagacity begins where that of most dogs ends; where his ends I know not. He has a perception poignant and true. He has taught me much about life. My obligation to him is that unpayable debt that we owe to one who has given us an insight into the meaning of existence; whose spiritual genius has led us to understand that life has about it a great deal more magic and mystery than people with pismally literal minds would have us believe; whose prescient hand has set ajar for us casements of the soul, through which are far gleams of what may be, for all I know, the gorgeous frontiers of Eternity.

XVIII

MIGRATION—ITS WONDER AND MYSTERY

I LOVE the legend of Persephone. The ancients were wise when they invented the story of her abduction by Pluto, and of her annual return to the earth, in the springtime, to visit her mother, Ceres. The story has a universal appeal, because the human heart knows the bleak loneliness of winter, and the romantic appeal of the return of spring. Persephone is at home once more on a visit; and life is joyous when she is with us.

It was on a misty night in mid-March, when the warmed and fragrant sap, one knew, must be running; when the gentle wind that breathed through the stark tree branches had a tenderness, as if but yesterday, down South somewhere, it had been romping with jasmines and roses. My heart felt the spring. I was coming home over a lonely Pennsylvania field, and several times I had stopped to listen for migrating birds; for it is on just such a night that they are likely to become bewildered in their epic journey, and as a result fly closest to earth. In the moist, mild darkness I heard a flock of wild geese passing northward, honking in standard fashion. For me, such a sound has always been full of powerful suggestions, primeval,

and full of nameless glamour. I have gazed, fascinated, at these flying wedges, valiantly grazing the wild moon's icy arc—led homeward by an overmastering instinct. A few days ago, they were in the delta of the Mississippi, and along the Gulf Coast; a few days hence, and they will be sporting amid the frost-rimmed sedges of some far Athabaskan lake! We who are supposed to love thrills above all else should get a tingle out of that thought, suggesting as it does the heroic mood, the dim, infallible wisdom, the immense journey, the thousand perils overcome the superb achievement of the migrating hosts.

In the still night I listened to the geese until they passed out of hearing. After some moments, I heard a single honker returning. Apparently he was quite near me, and he was giving a lost and lonely call. There was a note of protest in his tone, of distraction. Evidently, he had become separated from the flock. Many times he circled, crying out continuously. I heard him until I reached home. Ten minutes later I came out of the house to discover whether he was still in the neighbourhood. I then heard both the flock and the stray bird.

The flock was coming back. It must have understood that it had lost one of its number. The wanderer must have heard its coming sooner than I. Instantly, his call changed to something like glad, contrite confession. The cries of the other geese changed, too. He was telling them that he was sorry, and they were berating him for not having watched his step more carefully. The Royal Night Mail had turned back to

recover a straggler. The *Homeric* had hove to in order to search for a man overboard.

The whole performance seemed to me a wonder of the night, of wild intelligence, a thrilling touch to make one feel that migration is no mad escapade, no haphazard, blind dash; but orderly, precise, masterful. That incident of the recovery of the stray goose, and many another like it, have taught me that migration is no mere frantic dash into the distance. Its performance partakes of the nature of high art; it has always the rhythm of a great symphony. It requires strategy, cunning, patience, endurance, cleverness, unselfish lavishing of the strength and wisdom of the few for the good of the whole.

That the leaders of a migrating band are important personages, and that much is expected of them, I once saw rather humorously illustrated. I was driving along a country road in early April when there came into view a belated flight of wild geese. There were seventy-six in the flock, and the birds were flying too low for safety. I stopped to watch them. When they were almost over me, a farmer in a near-by yard began to fire at them with a rifle.

Naturally, they veered and mounted; but what amused me was the clamour that the birds set up—the wild gabble of criticism of the great gander that was leading the stately march. He, of course, was at the very point of the wedge. I distinctly saw the two geese behind him and a little on either side of him turn their heads to shout raucously at him, and at the

same time each quite evidently gave him a blow with his wings. Immediately he was displaced as a leader, discredited, and fell back far in the line, all the other geese "chastising him with the valour of their tongues," and trying to strike him as he passed them.

To interpret the meaning of the behaviour of the geese as a protest against their unwary leader might be considered pure imagination, were it not for the fact that I have confirmed my idea of it many times, not only with wild geese but also with wild ducks, with crows, and with other birds. The leader of a migrating flock is like a watchman that feeding crows post to give them warning of the approach of an enemy. If the sentinel permits an enemy to creep near, he is usually severely punished. I once caught an old crow watchman dozing, and managed to kill several out of the feeding flock. The frightened birds, though flapping away wildly, gave their attention less to escape than to the guard who had betrayed them. They buffeted him until he cried out for mercy. As mute sable witnesses of the fury of his comrades, many jetty feathers floated down to the field.

I have mentioned migrants seen and heard; but I am sure that comparatively few of the migrants that pass us are observed; and we have attributed our failure to seeing them to their going by in the darkness. Probably the better reason is that they fly higher than is generally supposed. On the very crest of the Blue Ridge, at a point where the hills are twelve hundred feet high, I have seen geese and ducks flying a thousand feet over my head. From the valley

below they would hardly have been visible. The officials of the great Trigonometric Survey of India photograph the sun on every clear day, and at times the pictures show other things. Quite recently a flock of wild geese was photographed at a height of five and one half miles.

When migrants pass close to the earth, their presence apparently never fails to affect their tame friends and relatives. Often in the spring, and also in the autumn, flocks of tame geese and ducks will rise from the meadows, or even from yards and pens, and fly with joyous abandon and distraction for considerable distances; and I have frequently heard domestic geese and ducks answer, with a far homesick recollection, the calls of their wild cousins from the sky.

Quail also, though they are not supposed to migrate, will often, in the autumn, rise high in the air as a covey, and fly great distances—ending their bizarre flight sometimes in very unaccountable places, such as the back yards of city homes, the trees along a village street, or the gardens of a very civilized community. The ruffed grouse, that lordly prince of the woodland, in the fall of the year is sometimes infected with the travel spirit; and at such a time I have found him far from his native haunts. I was shooting along a stream one November, a stream some five miles from the nearest mountain, when to my amazement I flushed one of these splendid birds. One autumn, while in North Carolina, I saw another of these superb aviators come dashing incontinently over a small valley and up a wooded slope, on the

crest of which I had my home. The regal courier unhappily sped straight through one of the large windows of the house, and fell stunned into the room beyond. I picked it up; it soon revived, and upon being released sped off as buoyantly as ever.

The Indians believed that the autumn was the time of semi-madness for many wild creatures; and this distraction of would-be migrants, together with the fact that the fall of the year is the mating season for many of the larger animals, lends much evidence to support this otherwise apparently fanciful and poetic belief.

In addition to those that have a sudden ancient thrill to migrate, but never quite accomplish it, there are those that really would, but cannot, because of wounds or other similar handicaps.

I remember going one day in early March into the great Santee Delta in South Carolina, which is only across the river from my old home. At that season of the year the region is aglow with spring greenery. Especially in the dewy hours of morning the whole world looks like a glistening beryl, a twinkling emerald. As I paddled into that strange, still country, the tide was high; ditches, canals, and creeks were flooded; many of the old waste fields were mere shimmering expanses of limpid water.

The ducks that had wintered by the thousands on the delta had, for a week or more, been moving northward. When I invaded the reedy wastes which had been their winter playgrounds, they were silent and

deserted. Here and there I saw a shy king rail stepping with swift stealth, that in itself is concealment, into the tall marsh. A great bald eagle that had harried the ducks all winter long now sailed disconsolately over his spacious domain.

Suddenly, from a sunny estuary behind a clump of greening marsh, I heard a mallard quacking. He did not know that I was near; but he evidently was aware of some presence that disturbed him. Nor was it the eagle. A small flock of widgeons passed, speeding northward. That day they might not stop short of estuaries around Nags Head, or the vast bays of Currituck. A teal has been timed on a straight stretch of a river to fly one hundred and twenty miles an hour. These ducks were, I judged, going about seventy-five. This mallard saw them, and he wanted to join the flock. Why he did not, I soon discovered.

Paddling round a point of marsh, I saw him behind a fringe, still unaware of my presence. Evidently, he was wounded. Some hunter had shot him down in the marsh, possibly weeks before this; and while he had managed to escape the eagle's vigilant eye, and the prowling stealth of many a wildcat, he could not join his comrades on their spring flight. It may be that I am over-estimating his emotion; but I thought I had never heard cries so pathetic and appealing.

All of us, presumably, have experienced what it means to be left behind; and in the case of this lone mallard he was to be left a couple of thousand miles behind by his kith and kin. I heard him importunately hail the fleeing flocks; and I saw two or three

of their number crane their necks and gaze downward; but they did not stop.

Later that morning I saw other ducks, and their presence comforted me. There was to be, I knew, some comradeship in misery. Indeed, there must have been joy in that fellowship; for that summer I found mallards mating on the delta. Books of science tell us that mallards never mate in the South; but Nature has a way of playing tricks on the writers of solemn books. Here were migrants that couldn't migrate; yet they managed to find life very much worth while after all. They could not go with their families; but they managed to get along quite well; and ere long their families came back to them! I guess it is sometimes so with us.

All of us are interested in world's champions of any sort; yet up to this time no Olympic medal has been hung on the soft gray breast of the Arctic tern, the bird that executes the longest migration flight achieved by any of the myriads of the winged hosts. It is called "Arctic" because it chooses the very Far North as its nesting ground; indeed, it has been found mating as far north as land has been discovered. Its tiny chicks are reared amid latent icebergs, blizzards, and every other condition that would seem adverse to the rearing of young. One nest of this extraordinary bird has been found within a few degrees of the North Pole!

As soon as the young are fully fledged, the tern begins his epic overseas journey, airily passing lordly

New York, flouting the romantic and alluring shores of Virginia, even passing the Florida Riviera, and the aromatic West Indies; following the immense length of the South American seaboard, down to the distant and dim Falklands, down past remote South Georgia, down toward the Antarctic Circle, where it delights to spend our winter; tirelessly skirting the frigid edges of that lone and disastrous region. This Odyssey of Migration represents a flight of fully eleven thousand miles.

Of this remarkable air voyage, no man speaks with more authority than Wells W. Cooke, the expert on bird migrations, in the Biological Survey. He says that the Arctic terns arrive in the Far North early in the summer and leave late in August, staying about fourteen weeks at the nesting site and that they probably spend a few weeks longer in the winter than in the summer home. This would leave them scarcely twenty weeks for the round trip of twenty-two thousand miles.

"Not less than one hundred and fifty miles in a straight line must be their daily task," says Mr. Cooke, "and this is undoubtedly multiplied many times by their zigzag twistings and turnings in the search of food.

"The Arctic tern," Mr. Cooke goes on to say, "has more hours of sunlight and of daylight than any other creature on the globe. At the most northern nesting site the midnight sun has already appeared before the birds' arrival, and it never sets during their entire stay in the breeding grounds. During two

months of their sojourn in the Antarctic the birds do not see a sunset, and for the rest of the time the sun dips only a little way below the horizon, and broad daylight is continuous. The birds therefore have twenty-four hours of daylight for at least eight months in the year, and during the other four have more daylight than darkness."

While the Arctic tern makes the longest migration flight, no other bird compares with the golden plover, when we consider the strange and marvellous flight that it takes, its achievement having much of the same powerful appeal to the imagination as a non-stop transatlantic passage by airplane. There is a regular route of migration from the shores of Nova Scotia to the Lesser Antilles, and thence to the north-eastern coast of South America. It is a favourite route for many aquatic birds, but especially for the golden plover.

Breeding in those lonely wastes within the Arctic Circle known as the "barren grounds," as soon as the young can take wing the golden plover starts for Labrador; thence, after several weeks' stay, the birds repair to Nova Scotia—the jumping-off place for the most wonderful of all non-stop bird flights. Their objective is the coast of South America, twenty-four hundred miles away over the trackless waters. Occasionally, in stormy weather, the voyagers may "put in" at Bermuda, or at some of the islands to the southward; but if the weather is favourable their immense journey is accomplished without rest or

pause. Flying both day and night, these spirited and beautiful birds actually pass from Canada to Brazil without a stop.

I used to have a mocking bird—a regular pet, though he was never caged—with whom I was on the most intimate terms of friendliness—until my Delaware grapes began to ripen. Then his raids made me cool in my attitude. He lived in a dense cedar in my yard, lurking for the most part in its dusky shadows; but he would emerge often in the grape season; and occasionally to fill the world with wild music—like some moody genius who retires into solitude, whence he presently reappears with a masterpiece.

I often tried to discover how many kinds of birds this particular mocker imitated; the complete list (some little leeway should be allowed me for mistakes) was eighty; and often in a single brief concert, as spontaneous as it was inspired, he would give the calls and songs of thirty or more birds. Most of these notes, being of birds with which I have since boyhood been familiar, were not in the least difficult to identify. But what was my astonishment one day to hear him clearly imitate the note of a rare migrant—the Bartramian sandpiper—a note not native to the mocker's Southern country, one that could have been caught by him only from some high-passing migrant, fleeting eerily by under the stars. I believe science should accept as authentic the mocker's repetition of a call or a song as proof that the bird imitated has been in the neighbourhood, though no human eye has seen it. I have heard this superb mimic give the notes of sev-

eral birds that I could not identify; doubtless they were of migrants that stop rarely, if at all, on the Carolina coast.

Half the joy of life seems to be in little things taken on the run—or on the fly. I love to think of the mocking bird's being able to catch the fugitive note of a far aërial wanderer, and, without any loss of its haunting strain, handing it on to me. Often, on a moonlight night in October, I have seen him take the air on quivering wings; and in lyric ecstasy voice the meaning and the mystery and the beauty of the dreaming world. Listening to his marvellous minstrelsy, and watching the moon write her silvery scattered dreams on the incoming tide that flows past my porch, I have felt him to be an interpreter of all the glamour that my heart was aware of, but was baffled to express. Any bird that can interpret wonder is worth hearing. I fully expect him at some time to let me hear the mellow fluting of the golden plover. If anyone in Carolina can hear that mystic rover, the mocking bird can.

How long the remarkable passage of the golden plover takes has not yet been ascertained, nor is it soon likely to be. But it is not unreasonable to believe that an average speed of thirty miles an hour is maintained; the trip would then be one of three days and three nights.

But upon reaching the shores of South America, the heroic journey of the golden plovers is by no means ended. They resume their flight, voyaging

southward, and at length reach the pampas of the Argentine. Some go as far as Patagonia. Here they remain from the late summer until the March following. Upon their arrival in South America, they find the native plover busily nesting; but it is said that no migrant from the North ever mates in the Southern Hemisphere.

Upon their journey northward in the early spring, the plovers follow an entirely different route. Overland they speed to the northern coast of South America; then they traverse the Gulf of Mexico, entering the United States by the way of Texas and Mississippi. Up the valley of the Mississippi they go, and by the first of June are once more at their nesting ground far within the Arctic Circle. This epic cycle forms an immense ellipse, the respective tips of which rest upon the Arctic North and upon the plains of Argentina.

The golden plover of the Pacific Coast flies overseas from Alaska to Hawaii. "It seems incredible," says an authority, "that any birds can lay a course so straight as to attain these small islands lying in mid-ocean, 2,000 miles from the Aleutian Islands to the north, 2,000 miles from California on the east, and 3,700 miles from Japan on the west. And yet, year after year, the hosts of the golden plover pass from Alaska to the South Sea Islands, and thence in mating time they return to their far breeding grounds in Arctic America."

Of flights wholly over land, the night-hawk is said

to make the longest migration, passing 7,000 miles from the country of the Yukon to the Argentine. The upland or whistling plover flies from Canada to Patagonia. It is one of the earliest migrants, often beginning its southward journey in July. The scarlet tanager summers as far north as Canada; its winter home is in Peru.

One effect on the annual two migrations is to bring near to us wanderers that otherwise we should never see; and I have had a good many thrills from encountering gorgeous strangers, *en route* for the ends of the earth, casually visiting my very back yard. I have seen the royal tern, and the greater yellow legs, two hundred miles inland; the golden eagle flying low over my tiny apple orchard; the nonpareil nonchalantly sitting on a rail fence more than three thousand miles from his winter home; the horned grebe among my weedy raspberries; the black-crowned night heron in a small pear tree in my yard; the woodcock beside my spring; and the shy upland plover, at home on the pampas of the Argentine, loafing in the shade of my sweet corn patch! Strayed voyagers, romantic travellers, they vividly colour familiar places, touching them with the nameless charm of the luring, the distant, the strangely beautiful.

These tarriers from dim glamour-lands speak to my heart of God. They tell me that somewhere infallible wisdom dwells, guiding millions on their way. They speak to my spirit with all the unanswerable eloquence of natural beauty.

There seems hardly any doubt that individuals of a species return year after year to the old homes of which they have become fond. I know a sunny, secluded meadow in southern Pennsylvania, where, five years ago, I heard and saw a mocking bird. The behaviour of the bird led me to believe that it was nesting there. Again, in another year, I was in the same meadow—at sunrise on a morning of late April. From the top of a huge sycamore I heard a bird carolling deliciously a melody so rich and full and tinted with the bloom of dewy radiance that it was a fit herald for the rising of a springtime sun. The whole earth was emerging roseate from her bath of dew. The meadow was greenly sparkling under the laciest of mist mantles. My first guess was that the singing bird was a brown thrasher; he nearly always chooses the topmost bough of a tree from which to pour forth his wild, shy rapture. But then I knew it to be a mocking bird. How had it found this meadow? Was it a descendant of a bird seen long before? In human life it is common, almost infallible, for children (and grown-ups, too) to inherit a passionate love for a locality. It draws them as no other influence does. Why may not the same thing be true in Nature? Marked birds, such as purple martins, have been known to return to their houses year after year. Wild ducks do the same thing. For my part, I believe that most migrants not only know how to return to a given place but also love to return. A singular confirmation of this conviction is found in albinos.

These eerie white birds, which have lost the colour-

ing matter for their plumage, have been known to return for four or five years to the same locality, even to the *same tree*, for a nesting site. I know of a robin that was a regular summer sojourner in a certain Pennsylvania village. My friend Arthur Wayne, the naturalist, who has spent thirty years in the woods and fields and marshes of the coast of Carolina, reports the following interesting case of the return of an albino: "A perfect albino of the redtailed hawk made its appearance every winter from 1901 to 1905 on Dewees Island; but, despite all my exertions, I was unable to capture it. It arrived each year in November or December and stayed until March."

Sometimes a strange occurrence will utterly change the route of migration of a species. As a boy, bare-headed, I used to take a sort of romantic delight in following, in fascination, the huge flocks of long-billed curlews with which, during the migrations, the sandy bars and beaches near my home on the Carolina coast abounded. The whistling of those curlews "haunted me like a passion." Stately birds they were, with long sickle bills; heavy in the body, but possessed of a certain divinity of grace that one can always associate with a game bird.

In all that region now there is not a long-billed curlew to be found. They have been gone for more than thirty years. They were literally crowded from their feeding grounds by the smaller and less attractive species, the Hudsonian curlew.

In general, migration is far more of a drifting proc-

ess than it is a sustained flight. The hardier species lead the van; the delicate voyagers, like the warblers, come last. Often the males precede the females, and cry and call incessantly until their demure mates arrive. It is often during the migration that the nuptial plumage is donned. It is often during little stopovers on the passage North that mates find each other, and finish the journey as a pair. I have frequently watched mallards and wood ducks pairing during the spring migration.

Even the most practical mind must yield to a certain fascination, a certain mystery, when ushered into the presence of the gigantic fact, the superb achievement of migration; the mighty hegira of the vast bird squadrons, thronging "the long savannas of the blue." The sheer wonder of the thing is enough to fill a man's heart with grace, and send him to his knees before the Lord of Creation.

It is the first of October. As yet there has been no frost. The flowers are brilliant with those poignant colours of farewell that flaunt triumphantly, flouting the dread of winter. Most gaudy are certain gladioli; and about these a single ruby-throated humming bird is, in his dainty fashion, exceedingly busy. He is wholly concerned with the wild honey dew in those gorgeous bells, hanging, to him, like a huge carillon from the swaying spire of the stem. Yet this tiny fairy, as frail as thistledown, is on the eve of a prodigious journey, such a one, indeed, as might appall the oldest traveller. He is starting for Central America to-night. Yet he seems joyously unconcerned, prob-

ing with ecstatic bill the iridescent depths of the mighty bells. He does not appear to be buying travellers' checks. He isn't rushing around packing luggage and purchasing tickets. Something in his heart tells him that the time has come; but he knows that all is well. He has something to sustain him besides his wings. Perhaps it is what all of us must have.

Into the air he vanishes. The west is all afire; the sun has foundered, leaving a golden vortex. Up the tall oriel windows of evening the sunset roses climb. A black bat, as if performing mystically some dim religious rite, is careening on velvet wings. But my thoughts are with my tiny wanderer, somewhere out in the vast twilight settling over the world. I cannot be beguiled away from the thought of him, though from a little pine a woodthrush is softly warbling the angelus.

The winter is past. Spring is here, bringing me into the garden again. It is a morning in mid-May. There has been a torrential downpour the night before. Perched disconsolately on the dead twig of a dripping lilac bush is my faërie adventurer.

Safely had he come that immense journey. He had had no compass. He had travelled in the darkness, by the air route. Who had taken care of that tiny spark of life? Who had buoyed up those gossamer wings? Who had charted the course for this tiniest of aerial mariners? Who has sustained that palpitant elfin heart? I have but one answer; and the more I study migration, the more I am inclined to give it. God is

in the night. And when the time comes for our migration hence to a land unknown, through a misty darkness, He will not desert us. In the huge rainy night, in that cavernous and monstrous dark, the frailest abide secure. In that flight amid other spheres than ours, I believe we shall know what it means to be sustained by Everlasting Arms.

THE END

